

RUTH IS LOYAL TO THE LORD

Ruth 1:6–22

Naomi is left alone: no husband, no sons, no land, and no food. She is in Moab, the place of God's enemies. The quest for food that led her and her family out of Judah, however well-intentioned it seemed at the time, had come to absolutely nothing.

NAOMI RETURNS TO BETHLEHEM IN SPITE OF GOD (VV. 6–14)

Still chasing the dream of food, Naomi heard that God had come to the aid of his people (as he promised he would) and ended the famine in Judah. Once again, Bethlehem was truly the "house of bread." Graciously, Naomi released her daughters-in-law to go find other men, to marry, and to have a family. Thanking them for their loyalty to her on behalf of their dead husbands, she wishes God's blessing on them. Initially, they both decline and say they will stay with Naomi.

Naomi responds that she will never be able to replace their dead husbands and give them any sort of security in life. No loyalty was shown by Naomi to her God; no, it was God who had been disloyal to her and brought her such pain! Weeping together, Orpah sadly left her mother-in-law to go back to Moab, but Ruth strangely clung to Naomi.

RUTH LEAVES MOAB TO FOLLOW GOD (VV. 15–18)

Naomi's bewildered response to Ruth's loyalty demonstrates her own disloyalty to God. She again attempts to send Ruth back to Moab—back to her nation, and back to her gods! However, Ruth's loyalty was not just to Naomi; her loyalty was to the Lord, the one true God whom Naomi supposedly worshiped and obeyed. In response to Naomi's pathetic encouragement to go back to Moab's false gods, Ruth says she will stay with Naomi, naming the Jews as her people and Jehovah as her God. Her loyalty to Naomi and to the Lord would not be hindered by anything short of physical death. To this, Naomi had no response but to acquiesce.

LOYALTY SURROUNDED BY DISLOYALTY (VV. 19–22)

The chapter concludes with Naomi and Ruth leaving the country of Moab and returning to Bethlehem. Their return seemed to have been a surprise for the town which had apparently forgotten all about Naomi. She requested the townspeople stop calling her Naomi ("pleasant") and rather call her Mara ("bitter") because she believed that "the Almighty [had] dealt very bitterly with" her (v. 20). In her mind, she had left Bethlehem full, but God made her return empty. It was God who was at fault in all of her circumstances: he caused the famine, he took her husband and sons, and he had brought her back to Bethlehem destitute and penniless.

Yet here they were, coming back to Bethlehem just as the barley harvest was being brought in, one more example of how "the Lord had visited his people and given them food" (v. 6).

Key verse: *“But Ruth said, ‘Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God’” (Ruth 1:16).*

Am I quick to blame God for problems stemming from my own disobedience? Is there a time when I have done this? What is a more biblical way to respond (think about grace)?

Am I quick to praise God for his graciousness in spite of my faithlessness? When have I done this recently? When do I find this most difficult?

Am I as loyal to God as I am to family, friends, or coworkers? To whom does my ultimate loyalty belong? What are some ways I can show loyalty to God?