

**A Bittersweet Providence**  
**Ruth 1:15-22**

My concern for Valley Bible is that we wouldn't know the blessing of trusting in God.

This morning from **Ruth 1:15–22**, we will see that because God is in control of all the good and evil that affects His people, that we must place our complete trust in Him without the shadow of a doubt.

Reading 1:1-5 is like coming up on the scene of a really bad car accident. There is a tragic mess and no one quite knows how to handle the situation because they are all still in shock.

**A. Naomi Attempts to Protect Her Daughter-in-Law (15-18)**

Upon looking at the three attempts where Naomi tells her daughters-in-law to remain in Moab, it is key to note that she is “attempting” to protect them. She only thinks she is doing what is best for them.

She argues with Orpah and Ruth with such persistence and persuasion. Why? Well, think of how much of a failure she may feel like. She is far from home. She has been far from the Lord for more than a decade living in Moab. She has no husband to give her protection so she feels like she must now be the protector. She has no sons so she can't give her daughters-in-law any hope of marriage and thus security in life. She is too old to remarry and bear children that her daughters-in-law may remarry later on.

And she feels as if her Lord has given up protecting them altogether. So she says to her daughters-in-law, “Go to a place where you will have hope. Go back to Moab so you can be remarried and find rest.”

But what is Naomi essentially doing? She is turning them away from the Promised Land and the providential Lord, the only place of true hope, rest, and ultimate salvation. Securing their chances for remarriage became her focus and not drawing near to the house of the Lord to find rest.

The thing is when we feel like the hand of the Lord is against us in trials, hardship, and suffering, we grow bitter and all kinds of sin creeps in. We

compromise, we complain, we corrode. When we are far from the Lord, then our values become more temporal than eternal.

### **1. Naomi Recalls Sternly (15)**

And this recall means to “officially order (someone) to return to a place.” We aren’t talking about recalling all Firestone tires because of a factory defect; we are talking about Naomi recalling Ruth the Moabitess to “go back” to Moab where she is from.

Listen to her stern words, “**Behold**” (*Hinne* is the Hebrew word used to point to a person or a thing). “**Behold, [Look!] your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and her gods.**” In this third argument or attempt, she is pointing Ruth’s attention to her sister-in-law and trying to have her see that it only makes sense for her to return too. Orpah has left, so why don’t you? “Her people” would stand for the people of the country of Moab, their ethnicity, not her best friends. “Her gods” would indicate that Moab had more than one god and that the gods had jurisdiction, or their “deistic” power, only in and over their land. Gods and their peoples’ land were closely connected.

**Judges 10:6** says, “**Then the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the Lord, served the Baals and the Ashtaroth, the gods of Aram, the gods of Sidon, the gods of Moab, the gods of the Philistines; thus they forsook the Lord and did not serve Him.**”

Naomi saw Yahweh as active in Moab (**1:8, 9, 13**)

From **Numbers 21:29** and **1 Kings 11:7** we find that Chemosh was the chief god of the Moabites. From **2 Kings 3:27** we also discover that the Moabites required child sacrifice as a form of worship to him.

Wouldn’t this be the most natural thing to do, to go back to her people and her gods? Her sister-in-law has just left, she grew up here, she knows it as home, she must have offered worship there on a number of accounts, and on top of that, she doesn’t have any reasonable chance of getting married in Judah (therefore having security and provision and the blessing children). So shouldn’t this be an easy answer for her to come to?

In **verse 14**, we find that when Orpah left, Ruth “**clung to**” Naomi. The reader is left wondering why Ruth is still around. What is she up to? What is God up to?

Ruth is faced with the decision to remain in Moab and to continue to worship false gods and live with a pagan people, or she can return to Judah and worship the only true God and live with a people who are chosen by Him and consecrated for holy living, distinct from any other nation.

What will she do?

## **2. Ruth Remains Steadfast (16-17)**

This is a classic expression of faithfulness and steadfast, undying devotion. Dr. Block says, “Ruth’s words are among the most memorable in all of Scripture. Few utterances in the Bible match her speech for sheer poetic beauty, and the extraordinary courage and spirituality it expresses.”

We will examine 5 poetic elements of Ruth’s steadfast commitment, each in 2-line couplets.

When we examine these verses, I want you to have in mind a person or two in your life who you feel deeply committed to, or should be. And I want you to ask of yourself how you can be more committed to them in light of what we find Ruth saying. Jot something down as we go.

### **a. “Do not urge me to leave you or turn back from following you;”**

Ruth begins by a command, a plea. She declares, in response to Naomi, that she is serious and that she isn’t going anywhere. She is steadfast. She is fastened. She is fixed and firm in her devotion to her. And because Naomi is trying to drive the wedge between them, she pleads for her to cease.

**Proverbs 27:10c** says, “**Better is a neighbor who is near than a brother far away.**” Ruth couldn’t care less that she had brothers and sisters back home, she knew that Naomi was a truer friend to her.

The principle of commitment found here is that commitment involves a resistance to all pressures to break the relationship.

Do you resist those pressures that tempt you to be unfaithful in your commitment?

**b. “For where you go, I will go,  
and where you lodge, I will lodge.”**

Ruth’s commitment to Naomi was not contingent on a location or place to live. She was ready to up and move no matter where the Lord took Naomi.

I know that one of the greatest ways my dear wife has shown her affection towards me in marriage has been her willingness to up and move away from all she knew, people and places, to the beautiful high desert with me. She couldn’t have said, “I love you,” in a more physical and tangible way.

The word “lodge” is not used of a long stay. It means, “to spend the night” (**Genesis 19:2; Judges 19:4; Psalm 25:13**).

She essentially is saying, “Wherever the future takes us, I will be by your side.”

**c. “Your people shall be my people,  
and your God, my God.”**

The center couplet is the most impressive in Ruth’s declaration. It is the fulcrum of her faith; it is central and essential to her confession. These words convey the weightiest content of where her heart is at right now.

In the middle of her response to Naomi, she makes it clear as to why she is so committed to her in undying devotion—she has chosen to follow the true God of Israel. Ruth sees her closeness to Naomi as a good thing so that she could eventually draw nearer to the Lord by remaining with her on her way back to Judah.

The relationship of the words “your people” and “my God” clearly reflected the central covenant promise seen in the Old Testament as Yahweh relates to His children (**Genesis 17:7-8, Exodus 6:7; Deuteronomy 29:13; Jeremiah**

**24:7; 31:33; Hosea 2:23; Zechariah 8:8; 2 Corinthians 6:16; Revelation 21:7).**

**Exodus 6:7 says, “Then I will take you for My people, and I will be your God; and you shall know that I am the Lord your God, who brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.”**

Clearly, Ruth is making a major statement of faith in choosing to forsake her former ways to follow the ways of the Lord. She is demonstrating repentance.

**1 Thessalonians 1:9 says, “For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God.”**

To the best of Ruth’s knowledge she is responding to the grace of God that is drawing her to Himself. She has spent more than 10 years now with Elimelech’s Hebrew family, being influenced by their way of living. And even all the way back in **Genesis 12:3** at the call of Abram, the Lord says, **“I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”**

**Deuteronomy 4:35-39 says, “To you it was shown that you might know that the Lord, He is God; there is no other besides Him. Out of the heavens He let you hear His voice to discipline you; and on earth He let you see His great fire, and you heard His words from the midst of the fire. Because He loved your fathers, therefore He chose their descendants after them. And He personally brought you from Egypt by His great power, driving out from before you nations greater and mightier than you, to bring you in and to give you their land for an inheritance, as it is today. Know therefore today, and take it to your heart, that the Lord, He is God in heaven above and on the earth below; there is no other.”**

**d. “Where you die, I will die,  
and there I will be buried.”**

“b” (where you go I will go; lodge) and “d” together form a merism, which is a pair of opposites (“life and death”) brought together to show that she is

declaring emphatically, “Everywhere you will be I will be; in life and in death.”

Now you minimalists, like I am all too often, are thinking, “Great! Naomi has to be about 40 to 50 years old so she might die sooner than later and Ruth can get off the hook really soon. That’s not a bad gig!” What Ruth says here is that she is going to go to the grave with her. She is planning on dying with Naomi’s people in Judah. This is total and permanent commitment.

It rings of the commitment that we ought to have to our precious Lord and Savior in **Luke 9:57-62**. **“As they were going along the road, someone said to him, ‘I will follow you wherever you go.’ And Jesus said to him, ‘The foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.’ And he said to another, ‘Follow me.’ But he said, ‘Lord, permit me first to go and bury my father.’ But Jesus said to him, ‘Allow the dead to bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim everywhere the kingdom of God.’ Another also said, ‘I will follow you, Lord; but first permit me first say good-bye to those at my home.’ But Jesus said to him, ‘No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.’”**

What does your commitment to Christ look like? Are you looking at other things in your life first, and then Christ? Are you riding the fence still? Have you partially committed your life to following Him and then looked back at what seemed so precious to you and longed to be there instead?

What kind of commitment is Christ worth? Is He worth anything less than forsaking all and following with an undying, undivided devotion to Him?

**1 Corinthians 6:19b-20** says, **“You are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in you body.”**

**e. “Thus may the Lord do to me, and worse,  
if anything but death parts you and me.”**

She most likely did the finger across the throat symbolic action as the oath was pronounced. Saying in a sense, “If I go bad on my oath, then I am a dead woman.”

Ruth's commitment involved a change in life direction, away from her past ties and toward a new God, Yahweh. Her commitment, as she expressed, extended past the grave. And as we see here in this last couplet of commitment, she invokes Yahweh and calls on His authority to be the grounds for her statement.

### **3. Naomi Resigns Suddenly (18)**

"She was determined", or "steadfastly minded." In the Hebrew verb tense it is used it means, "to confirm oneself in a purpose; be determined."

**Psalm 31:24** says, **"Be strong, and let your heart take courage, all you who hope in the Lord."**

### **B. Naomi Approaches to Prompt the Whole City (19)**

"Prompt"-to cause or bring about feeling or action.

"All the city was stirred"-Bethlehem, the house of bread, echoed with excitement; there was a murmur among them asking, "Could this be Naomi?" No doubt they had joy and excitement upon her return and most likely all the men were out in the fields harvesting while the women in town were scurrying about telling other women that Naomi had returned.

### **C. Naomi Answers to Protest the Almighty (20-21)**

Naomi answers the question being murmured from the crowd of women in four accusations against the Almighty, Sovereign Lord in verses 20-21. She just bursts with protest, disapproval, and objection.

#### **1. "The Almighty has embittered me"**

**"Do not call me Naomi,"** which means "pleasantness," **"call me Mara,"** which means "bitterness," for I don't feel pleasant at all. I am bitter because **"the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me."**

Let's say your name meant, "Victorious One." And everyone was called by what his or her name meant, like in biblical times. If I came up to you saying your name over and over again in normal conversation after your softball

team just played Gerry's team, you are going to say to me, "Do not call me Victorious One. Call me Sore Loser because that is what I feel like."

She joins in with Job in **Job 27:2**, when after losing everything, he says, "**As God lives, who has taken away my right, and the Almighty, who has embittered my soul.**"

When do you get mad at others or a God? When hard times come your way or into a loved ones, do you struggle to trust the Lord?

## 2. "The Lord has emptied me"

**"I went out full, but the Lord has brought me back empty."** This is the Hebrew word order which conveys the emphasis that she went from full to empty and it was the Lord's doing.

Clearly with the loss of her husband, Elimelech, and her two sons she was feeling pretty empty and hopeless. I can't imagine the loss of a loved one. I break so easily when I just hear about someone else losing a sister or family member or close friend.

You may think of a verse like **John 10:10**, which says, **"I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly."** And you may not be able to feel like you are able to reconcile that truth with your empty feelings.

Has the Lord sovereignly allowed you to lose someone or something precious to you? What has He taught you through it? What have you learned about the way you respond to that kind of loss?

## 3. "The Lord has witnessed against me"

This is a judicial term that Naomi is employing. She is saying that the Lord has called her to the stand and declared her guilty. "It portrays her as a defendant in a legal action who has already been found guilty and punished but who knows neither the charges nor the testimony against her."-Hubbard

Have you ever wanted to offer a rebuttal with God? Something has happened and it has gone in a way you didn't see fit, and then you think to



God, “Oh God, please change that/this! I really wanted that. I didn’t do anything to deserve that. This is unfair.”

#### 4. **“The Almighty has weakened me”**

Here is her final answer and protest against the Lord, the Almighty. She says, **“The Almighty has afflicted me.”** This could also mean, “to cause distress to, to inflict misery, or to do harm.”

All I could think about is how many times I have been completely thrashed behind one of boats at the lake this summer. Those of you who have been to high school camp, or ROCK wakeboard days, and all the rest of you who follow along on Face Book, you know what I am talking about.

But Naomi is talking about the Almighty who is doing harm to her unjustly. She feels it, and is going to make sure that others hear about all the pain the Almighty has caused her, all the evil He has done to her.

#### **D. Naomi Arrives to Plant Herself in Bethlehem (22)**

The month of April in the middle of spring would be **“the beginning of barley harvest.”** This is the time Israel would bring the first fruits of the harvest as a consecration of the harvest (**Leviticus 23:10**). What are the odds? What a coincidence!

The story, for chapter 1, has come full circle. They are back in Bethlehem. There is no more famine. There is springtime, a time of new life and a new beginning. This is a time when the people would be expressing their joy and praise to God for His goodness.

I prayed, “Lord, what does Valley need upon examining this text?” And the truth of the Word of God overwhelmed my heart, “To trust in the Lord.”

Whether you are a Ruth learning to trust entirely on Him, or if you are a Naomi struggling to trust in Him through the hard times, may we all see the providence of the Lord in our lives. May we be subject to His sovereignty. May we wait on His perfect provision and in His perfect timing. May we see with eyes of faith what it is we must do at the crossroads. May we join with

the people of God and be characterized by one thing: our faith in the one true God.

**Isaiah 46:9b-10** says, “**For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things which have not been done, saying, ‘My purpose will be established, and I will accomplish all my good pleasure.’”**

**Let us trust in the sweet providence of God and not grow bitter, doubting God’s perfect love and purposeful plan for our lives.**