

Ruth Chapter One: Travelling Together (and Matthew 6:25-34) 9 August 2026

I once went on a holiday which aimed to teach people how to walk with map and compass. Much of the instruction was done indoors where we learned how to interpret the symbols on Ordnance Survey maps, how to quote grid references, how to allow for magnetic variation - the difference between Grid North, and Magnetic North, how to use a certain Swedish make of compass, and how to plan a route. By the end of the week, the group was split into two's or three's and all the groups were given a different starting point from which we all had to make our way to a common meeting point at the end of the day, taking into account the terrain, time it would take, key points to look out for along the route and so on.

I wouldn't have wanted to do it on my own, but with 2 companions we all helped each other and all the groups came home safely, congratulating ourselves at how clever we were. It was all very planned and predictable and if we

had got into difficulties, we had the phone number of someone to call.

Today we're thinking about a very different journey: that of Naomi and Ruth. This was not recreational walking, there were no maps and compasses, a walk that was also a house moving without a removals van, taking only what could be carried, a walk into an unknown future.

For Naomi this was a journey she had made many years before, in reverse. She and her husband Elimelech had left their home village of Bethlehem out of necessity. There was a famine. And so they made their way to the other side of the Dead Sea, to Moab, a land where the inhabitants did not worship the God of Israel. Not somewhere they would have wanted to go, but there was no choice: it was a case of move in order to survive, and no doubt there were other families all doing the same thing.

The same journey can look very different when you do it in the opposite direction. For Naomi this should have been a joyful return to her home in Bethlehem because the news had reached Moab that “the LORD had come to the aid of his people by providing food for them”. The famine was over. But Naomi had experienced great tragedy. Not only her husband but her 2 sons had died. She was weighed down with loss. Without her menfolk she was vulnerable and powerless to provide for herself. Again she is forced to make a long journey simply in order to survive. Added to this, she feels that God is against her. Her whole life has turned sour. She even suggests that people should stop calling her Naomi which means “pleasant” and instead call her Mara which means “bitter”.

I wish we knew a little more about Naomi. What was it like in the good days before tragedy struck. How did she assimilate to life in Moab and how did she react when her sons married Moabite women? She certainly seems to have made a good impression on her daughters-in-law Ruth and Orpah. They are prepared to leave their families and set out

with Naomi to a foreign land. And when, after going some way, Naomi tries to persuade them to return home, they don’t want to leave her. They have a good cry and say “no, no, we’re coming with you”. In the end Orpah makes what seems like a common-sense decision. There can be nothing for her in Judah, and she turns back to her people and her gods. But Ruth persists. It’s clear that her love for Naomi is genuine and she can’t bear to think of Naomi making the long trek on her own, without any support. But for Ruth herself it’s a risky strategy. As we know all too well today, migrants are not always well received and are vulnerable to exploitation.

Ruth makes an astonishing declaration of loyalty to Naomi: “Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the LORD deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me”.

Notice that she is already calling God by the name he was known in Israel “the LORD” (written in capital letters in our

Bibles so that we know it's the special name that God said he was to be known by (the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob). *This* God, the God her husband and her mother-in-law had worshipped and spoken about was now *her* God too.

And so these 2 women continue on their way. Falling into step, getting to know the pace each one preferred. Finding places to stop wherever they could. Sharing their thoughts and feelings. The great benefit of walking is that it helps us to think through things which might otherwise cause us to sit and brood. Walking with a companion frees the mind and enables us to talk more freely than we would do otherwise, without any distractions we learn to listen, and it helps us to get to know someone. (A treat in store for our group who are going on pilgrimage next month.) I'm sure that Ruth and Naomi grew closer together on their journey allowing Naomi to share her bitterness and heartache; allowing Ruth to speak about her husband as she grieved for him.

When they finally arrive in Bethlehem there is still an air of sadness. People hardly recognise Naomi. She has been away for so many years and her appearance has changed through tragedy as well as age.

But there is a brief glimpse of hope. They *arrive just as the barley harvest is beginning*. This good timing is surely no coincidence. Not only is it the main reasons they have returned, but it speaks of God's provision and the hope that there is more to come. This is a turning point. There will be a new beginning for Ruth and Naomi. God has not abandoned them. In fact, he has been with them all along. Time and time again we see God *on the move*, travelling with people who have to leave home because of famine, or exile, or because they are trying to escape from someone from their own family, or because God is sending them somewhere else. God cannot be tied to one place. Jesus was always on the move too. He was always walking somewhere (he didn't have a car otherwise not so many people would have been healed!), from Galilee to Jerusalem

and back many times and always meeting people at just the right point in their lives when they needed him. He told them not to worry about their lives but to learn God's way of doing things and to trust that he will provide us with what we need, just as he provides for the birds of the air, and all the rest of creation. I wonder if, when you look back at your life you can see things which happened that turned out to be significant that you may conclude was God at work in your life rather than just coincidences. We meet certain people. We travel to a certain place. We find ourselves at a certain church, and so on.

Ruth's faithfulness to her mother-in-law mirrors God's faithfulness to us. He walks with us through the good and bad times of our life. Even when things get very bad, he does not abandon us.

If we read on, Ruth goes on to marry Boaz who *just happens to be* relative of Naomi, and they have a child called Obed. This is not only a great blessing to his parents, but also to Naomi. How appropriate then that we should also this morning be giving thanks for the precious gift of a child.

Just as Ruth and Boaz celebrated Obed, Stacey and Marvin and their family are here today to celebrate the gift of Romeo.

The Book of Ruth ends by telling us that Obed became the father of Jesse who was the father of King David. And into the line of David was born Jesus Christ, our Living Lord, the greatest gift of all, who came to tell us that we are *all* loved and precious in God's sight and to teach us to follow *his* way.