

Week 46, Lecture 146.¹ Ruth 1:1-5

Originally all of chapter 1 was one lecture. I have divided it into 3 parts: 1:1-5; 1:6-18; 1:19-22

Location in Bible: Catholic / Protestant Bible between Judges and 1-2 Samuel
*The Jewish Study Bible*² after the “Law” and the “Prophets,” among the “Writings”

My Outline of Chapter 1 (following the paragraphing of the NABRE)

- I. Naomi in Moab, 1-18³
 - 1-5 Characters Introduced
 - 6-14 Naomi and her daughters-in-law
 - 15-18 Dialogue between Naomi & Ruth
- II. The Return to Bethlehem, 19-22

Post-Lecture Addition. Alice Laffey’s Outline of Ruth 1⁴

- I. Act 1: Famine, Moab, and Death chapter 1
 - A. Introduction, 3 Widowed Women 1:1-7
 - B. The Action: Relationship & Return 1:8-21
 - C. Narrative Transition 1:22

Ruth 1:1-5, Characters Introduced. Translation.

¹ And it came to pass (*wayēhi*) in the days when the judges were judging, there was (*wayēhi*) a famine in the land, and a man went from Beth Lehem Judah to dwell in the fields of Moab, he and his woman and his two daughters. ² And the name of the man [was] Elimelech and the name of his woman [was] Naomi, and the name of his two sons [was] Mahlon and Chilion, Ephrathites from Beth Lehem Judah, and they went to the fields of Moab, and they stayed there. ³ And Elimelech, Naomi’s man, died, and she was left, she and her two sons. ⁴ And they took for themselves [= married] Moabite women; the name of the first [was] Orpah, and the name of the second [was] Ruth. And they dwelt there about ten years. ⁵ And both of them also died, Mahlon and Chilion; and the woman was left [separated] from her two boys and from her man.

V. 1 And it came to pass / there was. Identical expressions in Hebrew (*wayēhi*). Context determines translation.

The Judges were judging

Storyline time. The time of “judges,” i.e., the time between Moses (ca. 1200 B.C.) and the kings (ca. 1000 B.C.)

Hebrew “judges” were more charismatic warriors than legal experts

Author’s time. Many scholars date this work to the post-exilic era, i.e., after 500 B.C.

The fact that Jews place it among “the writings” is one indication that it is relatively late.

fields of Moab. Verses 1 & 3. The Masoretes punctuate this word as a plural, but the spelling is irregular.

Campbell suggests it is an archaic poetic spelling for the singular -- which is how most translate it.⁵

In verse 6 we do get the singular “field of Moab.”

¹ Lectures numbered consecutively. This is this week’s 1st lecture, but its number reflects its place in the **total** sequence.

² If you order one, be sure to get the one from OXFORD press, edited by Amy-Jill Levine & Mark Zvi Brettler.

³ The overly-literal translation is mine; the headings are from the NABRE.

⁴ Alice Laffey, “Ruth,” *New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (Prentice Hall, 1988) 554. More on this in Lecture 149.

⁵ Edward F. Campbell, *Ruth: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes, and Commentary*, vol. 7, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 49.

“In the land” or “on the earth.” The Hebrew word *’areṣ* can mean either “land” or “earth”
Ha-’areṣ (*Ha-’areṣ*) is a modern Israeli paper. It means “The Land.” For Jews *the* land is Israel.
“How long have you been in *ba-areṣ*?” is not asking how long you have been on earth!

V. 2 Elimelech = “My God [is] king”

In Hebrew **“woman” = “wife”**. In v. 3 **“man” = “husband.”**

Recall Loretta Lynn’s country song: “You ain’t **woman** enough to take my **man**.”

Celibacy was not a positive value in the OT tradition.

These are the words used in Gen 2:23

This one shall be called ‘woman’ (*’iššā, ishsha*),⁶ for out of ‘her man’ (*’ishāh, ishah*) this one has been taken.” (NAB)⁷

Verse 2 ends “. . . and they stayed there. “ This is how the Masoretes punctuate the text. (500-900 A.D.)

This could also be the beginning thought of verse 3, in which case the translation is:

“And while they stayed there, Elimelech, Naomi’s man, died . . .”

13:23 Divide Lecture Here

Week 46 , Lecture 147. Ruth 1:6-18

Continuation of Lecture

Ruth 1:6-14, Naomi Bids Farewell to her Daughters-in-Law. Translation.

⁶ And [then] she arose, she and her daughters-in-law, and she returned from the field of Moab, for she had heard in the field of Moab that YHWH had visited his people by providing **food** for them. ⁷ And she set out from the place where she was, and her two daughters-in-law with her, and they walked on the way to return to the land of Judah. ⁸ And Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, “Go! Return, [each] woman to the house of her mother. May YHWH show fidelity to you, just as you have shown to the deceased [husbands] and to me. ⁹ May YHWH grant to you that you find rest, [each] woman in the house of her husband.” And she kissed them, and they raised their voices and they wept.

¹⁰ And they said to her: “Indeed we shall return with you to your people.” ¹¹ **But** Naomi said, “Go back, my daughters. Why will you walk with me? Are there still sons for me in my womb? And could they be husbands [men] for you?”

¹² Go back, my daughters, for I am [too] old to belong to a man. Even if I thought, ‘There is hope for me. If this very night I had a man, and also conceived sons, ¹³ would you wait therefore (*lāhen*) until they grew-up? Would you therefore (*lāhen*) keep yourselves withdrawn, not being with a man? No my daughters. **For exceedingly bitter for me from you;** indeed the hand of YHWH has gone forth against me.” ¹⁴ And they raised their voices and wept again; and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth **clung** to her.

General Comment

At this point the characters have been narrowed down to Naomi and Ruth. All the men are gone, and so is Orpah.

V. 6. “and she returned”

This is literally what the Hebrew says. Most translations “smooth out” this difficulty. E.g., “She arose to return.”

⁶ The first spelling is the “scientific” transliteration. It represents the Hebrew letters with Roman letters according to the system of the Catholic Biblical Association of America. The second spelling is a representation of how the word is pronounced.

⁷ The NABRE translates differently, and in my humble opinion, not as well. The NAB, following the Greek and the Aramaic assume the original Hebrew read “her” man, even though the word “her” is not found in the Masoretic Text. Actually only one letter, *heh* ה, needs to be added to the Masoretic Text so that it will say that she was taken from “her” man.

“by providing food for them.” The word *lehem* can mean “bread” or be a general word for “food.” The Arabic cognate *lahm* can also mean “food” generally, but when used of a specific food it means “meat.”

V. 8. qēre - kētiv (what is read vs. what is written.) May the Lord (prayer) vs The LORD will (future)

ʿn Hbrw ʿnly cnsnts wr wrttn ʿntl 500 -900 yrs ʿftr Jss.

The Masoretes used this device to make a correction without changing the sacred consonants

They would also use it when the wording was “indicate” for public reading.

Modern English Example: He stepped into a pile of **shut*** *dng [marginal note]

What is written is **shut**. What is read is **dung**.

V. 13. is a classic conundrum.

Normally *lāhen* means “for them [feminine], i.e., “for those **women**.” Many therefore emend the text to *lāhem*, “for them [masculine] i.e. “for those **men**.” Others think it is related to an Aramaic word meaning “therefore.” Others think it is a very ancient masculine form.

V. 13, NET note on “for exceedingly bitter for me from you”

(*ki-mar-li me'od mikkem*) is notoriously difficult to interpret. It has been taken in three different ways:

- (1) "For I am very bitter for me because of you," that is, because of your widowed condition (cf. KJV, NKJV, ASV, RSV, NJB, REB, JB, TEV). This does not fit well, however, with the following statement ("for the LORD has attacked me") nor with the preceding statement ("You must not return with me").
- (2) "For I am far more bitter than for you" (cf. NASB, NIV, NJPS, NEB, CEV, NLT). This does not provide an adequate basis, however, for the preceding statement ("You must not return with me").
- (3) "For my bitterness is too much for you [to bear]" (cf. NAB, NRSV, NCV, CEV margin). This is preferable because it fits well with both the preceding and following statements.

V. 14, Ruth “clung” to Naomi

The same Hebrew word, *dābaq* (*davaq*)⁸ is used in Gen 2:24, “Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother, and **cleaves** to his wife . . .” (RSV). NABRE reads, “. . . and **clings** to his wife . . .”

Ruth 1:15-18, Dialogue between Naomi & Ruth

¹⁵ And she said, “Behold, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods. Go back after your sister-in-law. ¹⁶ And Ruth said, “Do not pressure me to forsake you by turning back from behind you.

For where you go, I will go where you lodge, I will lodge

Your people [will be] my people and your God, my God.

¹⁷ Where you will die, I will die and there I will be buried.”

¹⁸ And **she** saw that **she** was absolutely-determined to go with **her**; and she ceased speaking to her.

V. 18 Maddening Ambiguity!

Hebrew writers often do not provide helpful antecedents. Most English translators provide some nouns.

“And when **Naomi** saw that **Ruth** was absolutely determined to go with **her** . . .”

However, if the context were different, the same Hebrew words could mean;

“And when **Naomi** saw that **Ruth** was absolutely determined to go with **Orpah** . . .”

OR “And when **Ruth** saw that **Naomi** was absolutely determined to go with **Orpah** . . .” etc.!

V. 18, Ceased speaking to her.

This simply means she stopped urging her to leave -- not that they were no longer on speaking terms!

⁸ The first spelling is the “scientific” transliteration. It represents the Hebrew letters with Roman letters according to the system of the Catholic Biblical Association of America. The second spelling is a representation of how the word is pronounced. The letter “b” (*beth*) is pronounced as “v” when it is immediately preceded by a vowel.

26:36, Divide Lecture Here

Week 46, Lecture 148. Ruth 1:19-22

Continuation of Lecture

Ruth 1:19-22, The Return to Bethlehem

¹⁹ And they walked, both of them, until they came to Beth Lehem. And it came to pass when they came to Beth Lehem the whole city was stirred up over them, and the **women** said, “[Is] This Naomi?” ²⁰ And she said to the women, “Don’t call me **Naomi**. Call me **Mara**, for **Shaddai** has acted very bitterly toward me. ²¹ I walked [sc. away from here] full, and YHWH brought me back empty. Why do you call me ‘Naomi?’ when YHWH has afflicted me and **Shaddai** has brought evil upon me.” ²² So Naomi returned, and Ruth, her daughter-in-law, the Moabite woman, with her, the one who came back [with her] from the field of Moab. And they came to Beth Lehem at the beginning of the harvest of barley.

19. The Women Said. There is no verb in: This Naomi? Some translators put “Is this . . .” others “Can this be . . .” The noun “women” is not used. Hebrew does not need to use it. The verb is feminine-plural (*to ‘marnâ*). If even one man had been in the group of speakers, the verb would have been masculine-plural (*yo ‘mêrû*).

V. 20, Naomi / Mara.

Naomi is related to the Hebrew word for “pleasant,” or “sweet.” Mara is related to the word meaning “bitter.”

Verses 20 & 21. Shaddai.

Often translated “The Almighty,” following Jerome’s *omnipotens*.

The Greek often renders it *pantokrator*, “ruler of all.” This is not same!

One can be “ruler of all” and not be “almighty” in a technical theological sense.

The Greek here literally says “The Sufficient One” (*ho hikanos*, [NETS](#))

The Hebrew might literally mean, “God of the Breasts (*shadayim*)” or “God of the Mountains.”

In view of all of these possibilities, I thought it better just to transliterate the Hebrew word.

Verse 21. YHWH has afflicted / Shaddai has brought evil

In the OT, everything -- good as well as evil -- comes from God.

In 1 Samuel 16:14-16, it is an evil spirit **from YHWH** who afflicts Saul. Also 1 Sam 19:9.

In 2 Kings 22:23, it is YHWH who sends a **lying spirit** to deceive the prophets (see also 2 Chr 18:22)

By NT times, Judaism has been influenced by Persian religion, which had good and evil gods (demons).

By NT times, evil spirits do not work for God; they work for Satan.

You cannot understand the original meaning of the OT unless you forget what you know about Satan from the NT!

v. 22. Came “Back” [with her].

Actually Ruth is not “coming back.” She has never been in Israel before! Only Naomi is coming “back” to Judah.

I added “with her” in brackets.

The NABRE is more accurate historically “who accompanied her back . . .” -- but less literal than my translation!

Barley Harvest

This leads into the next chapter, where Ruth will go to glean.

Israelite farmers were allowed to make one pass harvesting their fields.

Anything they missed legally belonged to the poor, who had the legal right to “glean” whatever was missed.

A farmer had no right to shoo the poor off his land.

This was a form of “social welfare” in a simple agricultural society. More details on this in the next lecture.