
Ruth 1

Ruth 1:1–22

Naomi and Ruth Leave Moab for Judah

These studies are designed for believers in Jesus Christ only. If you have exercised faith in Christ, then you are in the right place. If you have not, then you need to heed the words of our Lord, Who said, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten [or, uniquely-born] Son, so that every [one] believing [or, trusting] in Him shall not perish, but shall be have eternal life! For God did not send His Son into the world so that He should judge the world, but so that the world shall be saved through Him. The one believing [or, trusting] in Him is not judged, but the one not believing has already been judged, because he has not believed in the Name of the only-begotten [or, uniquely-born] Son of God.” (John 3:16–18). “I am the Way and the Truth and the Life! No one comes to the Father except through [or, by means of] Me!” (John 14:6).

Every study of the Word of God ought to be preceded by a naming of your sins to God. This restores you to fellowship with God (1John 1:8–10). If there are people around, you would name these sins silently. If there is no one around, then it does not matter if you name them silently or whether you speak aloud.

Outline of Chapter 1:

- Vv. 1–5 **Naomi’s life in Moab**
- Vv. 6–13 **Naomi chooses to leave Moab**
- Vv. 14–22 **Naomi returns to Judah with her daughter-in-law, Ruth**

Introduction: In Ruth Chapter 1, a Hebrew woman, Naomi, and her husband, have raised two sons and then moved off to Moab, due to a famine in the land of Israel. They also married these guys off to Moabite women. Suddenly, the woman’s husband dies, and then her sons both die. Being an older woman, she has no one to take care of her. Her two daughters-in-law are both Moabite women and have no obligation to stay with her. However, Ruth, for whom the book is named, remains with Naomi and returns with her to Israel, saying, “I will go where you go, I will stay where you stay; your people will be my people and your God will be my God.” (Ruth 1:16b). This is probably the most well-known verse from this book.

In this chapter, we will get into a slug-fest when it comes to the vocabulary and grammar—particularly when we get to vv. 12–13. Not only is this not correctly translated anywhere, but, as a result, these verses are never correctly explained. Also, these verses make no sense apart from the culture of that day. When you have read this exegetical study, you will grasp exactly what is being said and why.

There is another point which is rarely made (not at all, to the best of my knowledge). The narrative portion of this book is relatively simple. Rarely do we have to stop and spend a great deal of time dinking around in the Hebrew. However, when Ruth and her daughters-in-law begin to speak, then we sometimes find ourselves in a grammatical mess. Naomi has lived in Moab for ten years. Her speech is going to contain certain *Moabisms* and an occasional Hebrew word or phrase which has been changed somewhat from living with the Moabites. This is like Yiddish or Chaldean—it is very similar to Hebrew, but it isn’t quite the Hebrew that we are used to. The daughters-in-law are Moabite women. They were brought up to speak Moabite. They have been married for at least ten years to Hebrew men and have no doubt learned Hebrew. However, their language should also contain some Moabisms as well, which it does. Therefore, as we go through the narrative portion of the chapter, things will be smooth sailing. As soon as one of these women begins to speak, then we’ll have to put some work into it.

[<<Return to Chapter Outline>>](#)

[<<Return to the Chart Index>>](#)

Naomi's life in Moab

Slavishly literal:

And so he is in a day of judging of the judges, is a famine in the land. And so a man from Bethlehem—Judah to sojourn in fields of Moab—he and his woman and two of his sons.

Ruth
1:1

Moderately literal:

And it was [when] the judges judged, [that] a famine was in the land. Also a man from Bethlehem [in] Judah [moved] to temporarily visit the country of Moab—he and his wife and his two sons.

In during the time of the judges, there was a famine in the land. Therefore, a man who had lived in Bethlehem, Judah, moved with his wife and two sons temporarily to Moab.

J. Vernon McGee speaks of this first verse: *This verse that opens the book of Ruth covers a great deal. In fact, it sounds like modern newspaper reporting. When I was in college, I had a job working on a newspaper, the "Memphis Commercial Appeal." As a cub reporter, I went out with some of the other reporters. Also I got acquainted with the city editor, who was a very nice man, and he attempted to help me all he could. Well, I tried to write up a story of an incident we witnessed one night in Memphis, and presented it to the city editor. He read it, just pushed it aside, and said he couldn't use it. Then he told me that there are two things which are always important to get into the first sentence of any article that's newsworthy: the time and the place. In fact, he said, "Get as much in the first sentence as you possibly can." The next time you're reading an important article on the front page of your paper, notice how much information is included in that opening sentence. Sometimes the first sentence is an entire paragraph, and it just about tells the whole story right there. It tells you what the incident is, where it took place, when it took place, and generally how it took place. Now the Holy Spirit of God is a very wonderful reporter. And so in this very first verse, He gives the time and He gives the place.*¹

The time frame for this story is during the time of the judges. Hamlin: *The force of these seven introductory words, "In the days when the judges rules..." is this: when violence against women, vengeance, idolatry, death, and disintegration were widespread as in the days of the judges, God's hidden hand was at work preparing a future for the survivor, her family, and her people, and, from a NT perspective, for all peoples of the earth.*²

We just recently studied the book of the Judges. First, Israel was ruled by Moses, who led them out of Egypt and through the wilderness. Then Joshua led them into the land and apparently acted as an elder, but did not actually rule over them. After Joshua, we have the period of the judges, which ran from sometime late in the 14th century B.C. to the mid-11th century B.C. You may recall: *Then Jehovah raised up judges who delivered them from the hands of those who plundered them. And yet they did not listen to their judges, for they committed adultery, pursuing other gods and bowed themselves down to them. They turned aside quickly from the way in which their fathers had walked in obeying the commandments of Jehovah; they did not do as their ancestors. And when Jehovah raised up judges for them, Jehovah was with the judge and delivered them from the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge; for Jehovah was moved to pity by their groaning because of those who oppressed and afflicted them. But it came about when the judge died, that they would turn back and act more corruptly than their fathers in following other gods to serve them and bow down to them; they did not abandon their practices or their stubborn ways (Judges 2:16–19).* McGee: *You would think that this new generation, whose fathers had known the rigors of slavery in Egypt, would serve God in a very wonderful way. But, you know, they didn't.*³

We automatically think something different when we hear the word *judge* (although that was no doubt a function of the various judges). However, they functioned more as a local leader and as a deliverer of several territories

¹ J. Vernon McGee, *Ruth*, Thru the Bible Radio, ©1976 in La Verne, California, p.11.

² E. John Hamlin, *Ruth Surely There Is a Future*; from the International Theological Commentary; Holmgren and Knight, editors; Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, MI; ©1996, p. 5.

³ J. Vernon McGee, *Ruth*, Thru the Bible Radio, ©1976 in La Verne, California, p. 11.

than they did as our notion of a judge. It was during this time period that this Book of Ruth takes place. We discussed the various theories as to *when* exactly this occurred during the time of the judges. Personally, I place it early during that time, very likely during the Moabite oppression, which was the second recorded oppression in the book of Judges (Judges 3:12–14).

We will cover Bethlehem when we get to Ruth 4:11. However, I should point out that the author of this book occasionally says some things which you would not expect to find in such a book. The book of Ruth is somewhat of a drama, but, on occasion, there appears to be some playfulness with the language which is incongruous with the tenor of the book. In this verse, they leave Bethlehem because of the famine in Bethlehem. To you, you're thinking, *I don't get the point; Bethlehem means House of Food.*

The masculine noun *sâdeh* (רָצוּף) [pronounced *saw-DEH*], means *field, land, open field, open country*. Owen renders this *country*; however, since this is in the plural construct, it is more properly rendered *[the] fields of*. Strong's #7704 BDB #961. Barnes suggests that this indicates the author was not from the country of Moab.⁴

What may help is to have a geographical grasp of what was going on here. Bethlehem was in northern Judah, nearly due west of the northernmost part of the Dead Sea. Moab is a country which is just south of the territory of Reuben, which is east of the Dead Sea. Reuben's territory takes up the northern half of the Dead Sea's east side and Moab takes up the southern half of the Dead Sea's east side. The NIV Study Bible reads: *Moab encompassed the expansive, grain-filled plateau between the Dead Sea and the eastern desert on both sides of the enormous rift of the Arnon River gorge. Much of eastern Moab was steppeland—semi-arid wastes not profitable for cultivation, but excellent for grazing flocks of sheep and goats.*⁵ To go from Bethlehem to Moab, one would travel either around the northern tip of the Dead Sea and then proceed south through Reuben; or they would go down along the western border of the Dead Sea, go through the northern portion of Edom, and up into Moab (it is less likely that they took this route).

Moab had an uneasy and often a hostile relationship with Israel. Recall that Abraham's nephew, Lot, had two sons by incest, Moab and Ammon, and God gave them land east of the Dead Sea. God also required that Israel refrain from conflict with Moab and Ammon. When the Jews were about to travel through Moab on their way to the Land of Promise, they had to make war with Sihon, who had taken much of Moab's land. Once he had been defeated, Moab did not express appreciation, but made an alliance with Midian and attempted to get the prophet Balaam to utter a curse against Israel (Num. 22–24). When this didn't work, Moab tempted Israel with their daughters, pulling them into a relationship with the gods of Moab, which brought on a plague in Israel which could have destroyed Israel's second generation. Moses told the people, *"No Ammonite or Moabite will enter into the assembly of Jehovah—none of their descendants, even to the tenth generation, will ever enter into the assembly of Jehovah, because they did not meet you with food and water on the way when you came out of Egypt, and because they hired against you Balaam ben Beor from Pethor of Mesopotamia to curse you."* (Deut. 23:3–4).

Much later, during the time of the judges, one of the first people to impose themselves upon Israel were the Moabites. Eglon, a king of Moab (the estimates are generally around the mid-1300's B.C.), had joined forces with the Ammonites and the Amalekites—who were also descendants of Esau—and they defeated Israel in battle and set up an occupational force in what appears to be Jericho. He was assassinated by one of the early judges, and Israel was no longer under any bondage to Moab. As I mentioned, I place the book of Ruth during this time frame, where there would be unrestricted travel between the two nations, and that there would be some intermingling of the populations. Some place the time period of the book of Ruth roughly century to a century and a half later. Even in that case, relations with Moab would no longer be strained, as there was free travel from one country to the next. This should not strike us as that unusual; we were enemies with the Japanese during World War II, and yet we've maintained close ties with Japan, where our relationship began to thaw in the 50's and flourished by the late 60's or early 70's. From the earliest times, Israel was instructed not to take the land of the Moabites or of the Ammonites, as this land was given to the sons of Esau by God.

⁴ *Barnes' Notes, Volume 2*, reprinted 1996 by Baker Books; p. 473.

⁵ *The NIV Study Bible*; ©1995 by The Zondervan Corporation; p. 362.

The Mesha stele [pronounced *STEE-lee*], also known as the Moabite stone, was from circa 830 B.C. In it, Mesha, a king in Moab, lays claim to the massacre of entire Israelite towns. The point in all of this is that Israel never had a good relationship with Moab. Had God not prevented Israel from doing so, Israel would have probably wiped Moab off the face of the map when they overthrew Sihon.

During the time of the judges, Israel was under discipline from God. The book of the Judges focuses primarily upon the hostilities between Israel and other nations—as well as the indigenous peoples of the land—and God’s discipline of Israel employing these other nations (read, for instance, Judges 3:13–18). However, this does not mean that oppression from other nations was God’s only method of discipline. In Lev. 26, God enumerated the ways that He would discipline Israel, and one of these methods included famine. For Israel, this would be strong agricultural limitations—primarily, rain would be scarce and crops would not grow. This forced this man and his family to move to Moab in order for him to provide for his wife and family.

Now, this family leaves Bethlehem-Judah and moves to Moab, which God calls His washpot (Psalm 108:9). We might think of it as a garbage can. Elimelech takes his family out from the House of Bread and goes into a country which is God’s garbage can. Now, don’t become confused by this. It was God’s will for them to temporarily leave the Land of Promise. God had made a woman in Moab—Ruth—whom He was going to bring to the Land of Canaan for a man of integrity—Boaz. To take her from Moab and bring her into Israel, God would use the famine in Israel and this family.

There are other authors who criticize Elimelech as being wrong to take his family to Moab and cite his death and the death of his sons as proof of discipline. Whereas, this is not an argument without merit, I personally would not make it. When hungry, Jesus and the disciples gleaned grain from a field. When questioned about this, He cited that David, when hungry, consumed the consecrated bread of the ark, something normally reserved for priests (Matt. 12:1–8 | 1 Sam. 21:1–6). We are further told that any man who does not provide for his own is worse than an infidel (1 Tim. 5:8). Therefore, I would personally not be so quick to judge Elimelech and the moving his family to Moab. God often uses circumstance such as economic depression to guide us in His will. Abraham moved to Egypt because of famine in Gen. 12:10. God directed the family of Joseph toward Egypt where Joseph was ruling due to famine in their land (Gen. 42–43 | Psalm 105:16–24). They were moved later due to a famine in a part of Egypt (Gen. 47:4). I personally moved quite a distance from where I was raised because of economic considerations. We read of several occasions where David was outside of the land of Israel, as circumstances mandated. With the completed canon of Scripture, God does not come to you in your dreams and tell you where to move to; while you are driving down the road, God does not slide into the passenger seat and tell you to turn right when you were thinking of turning left.

And a name of the man: Elimelech; and a name of his woman: Naomi; and a name of two of his sons: Mahlon and Chilion—Ephrathites from Bethlehem—Judah. And so they went into fields of Moab and so they are there.

Ruth
1:2

And the name of the man [was] Elimelech; and the name of his wife [was] Naomi; and the names of his two sons [were] Mahlon and Chilion. [They were] Ephrathites from Bethlehem [in] Judah. So they went to the country of Moab and are [living] there.

The man’s name was Elimelech; his wife’s name was Naomi; and his sons names were Mahlon and Chilion. They were from the family of Ephraim who had lived in Bethlehem in Judah, and now they had moved to Moab.

Elimelech means *My King is God* or *God is my King*, indicating that Elimelech’s parents were believers, and, very likely, he was as well. Early on, during the period of the judges, Israel showed some desire to have a king (Judges 8:22). The man that they asked, Gideon, was smart enough to tell them that Jehovah was their king (Judges 8:23). This name, *Elimelech*, indicates that his parents were aware the Jehovah-God was King over Israel.

The children had unusual names—*Mahlon* means *sickness* or *weakling*; and *Chilion* means *passing away*.⁶ One would think that these were not their original names but how they were recalled. However, they may have appeared sickly as infants.

An Ephrathite is a person from the stock of Ephraim. The essential difference between the two words is that the *m* on the end of Ephraim is dropped, and the new word is known as the adjective gentile of its noun cognate. English translators have traditionally added the *ite* or *ites* ending. Strong's #673 BDB #68. This family—at least by the husband—was from Ephraim and their inheritance would have been in Ephraim. What had obviously happened is that they left Ephraim for greener pastures in Bethlehem, which is a few miles south of Judah along the mountain range which runs along the west side of the Jordan River and the Salt Sea.

And so died Elimelech, a man of Naomi and so was left she and two of her sons.

Ruth
1:3

But Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died, and she was left, as well as her two sons.

But Naomi's husband, Elimelech, died, and she and her two sons remained.

The second verb is the 3rd person feminine singular, Niphal imperfect of *shâ`ar* (שָׂאָר) [pronounced *shaw-AHR*] which means, in the Niphal, *to remain, to be left over*. It is only found in the Niphal and the Hiphil. Strong's #7604 BDB #983. As is often the case in the Hebrew, the verb matches with the subject, which is the 3rd person personal pronoun; however, the *two sons* are also added to the action of the verb (which is common in the Hebrew). It was apparent that life was hard for them all, and that the work which her husband could get, along with their poverty, removed him from this life. In the ancient world, since she was still with her two sons, this was not the complete end of Naomi.

And so they took to them women—Moabites. The name of the one, Orpah and the name of the second, Ruth. And so they remained there about ten years.

Ruth
1:4

And they [the sons] took wives to themselves—Moabites. The name of one [was] Orpah and the name of the other [was] Ruth. They remained there [for] about ten years.

The sons married Moabite women; their names were Orpah and Ruth. The extended family of Elimelech lived there for about ten years.

In this verse, we have the feminine numeral *echâd* (אֶחָד) [pronounced *eh-KHAWD*] and it means *one, first*. Strong's #259 BDB #25. We also have in this verse the numeral ordinal *shenîy* (שֵׁנִי) [pronounced *sheh-NEE*], which means *second, the second*. When only two items are named, it can be rendered [*the*] *other*. Strong's #8145 BDB #1041. Either ten years transpired since Elimelech took his family into Moab, or the sons were married and living in Moab for about ten years.

Each major family in Israel (essentially the 12 sons of Jacob) was given an inheritance which was distributed by Joshua in the second half of the book of Joshua. Various families were given more specific distributions, which was not covered. However, an inheritance of land was given to each sub-group or clan; and God meant for that land to stay with that clan name for eternity. In fact, there were two sets of laws designed to do this, which we will review in Ruth 4.

I don't know that the meanings of the names of these women are important. *Orpah* means *deer* or *fawn* (and one source says *stubbornness*). *Ruth* means *beauty, friendship, personality*. It is not clear that we really know what their names mean, as they are Moabite women and these are Hebrew meanings.

Now, the fact that they married Moabite women is interesting. There are a lot of Christian racists out there who teach various forms of racial purity and quote specific verses in the Bible—chiefly Old Testament verses from the Law which warn the Jews against intermarriage. The only problem with intermarriage between Israelites and

⁶ Others have said that his name means *the jubilant* or *the crowned*.

Gentiles **who were living in the land of Canaan**, was the religious influence that these Gentiles would have over the Israelites (Judges 3:6). The only specific commandment was against intermarriage with Canaanites and the other degenerates which occupied the land that Israel took. God had ordered Israel to destroy these people, so they were beyond hope. There was no specific commandment about intermarriage with Moabites and the official seal of approval of Ruth is applied, as she is mentioned in the line of Christ (Matt. 1:5). She was a believer, as she chose the God of Naomi over her own god (Ruth 1:16). In fact, once a person became a believer and aligned themselves with the people of Israel, then God did not view them as outsiders (we observed this with the crafty Gibeonites in Joshua 9). So, even though we have the passage in Deut. 23:3⁷ which appears to forbid the intermingling of the Jews and the Moabites (and the Ammonites), there are apparently exceptions to this rule, and Ruth, if not her sister, Orpah, are exceptions to this rule.

One problem that some people have with Scripture is that they grab onto one or two verses like a dog with a bone and they just will not let go of these verses, and ignore every other passage of Scripture. Calvinists do this, Armenians do this, charismatics do this, those who believe that baptism (or anything, apart from faith) is necessary for salvation, etc. Allow me to digress: I have visited with some people on the web who believe that baptism is a requirement for salvation. In order to *prove* their position, they quote Mark 16:16 (which is not even in the Bible), they quote and misinterpret I Peter 3:18 (as well as James 2:17); and they throw in several verses where people are saved and baptized in close chronological proximity (interestingly enough, they will quote from many verses from the gospels, but disallow anyone mentioning the thief on the cross as a rebuttal to their arguments, because that was a different period of time). They ignore the fact that there are perhaps 50 or more verses which state very clearly that salvation comes by believing in Christ Jesus—faith alone in Christ alone. My overall point is that, when you compare Deut. 23:3 with this book and throw in the line of Christ of Matt. 1, it is clear that, in general, the Moabites and Ammonites were to be excluded from the worship of the Jews. However, there were exceptions of those who believed in the God of Israel, like Ruth, who not only became a part of the nation Israel, but was an ancestor of our Lord.

And so died also two of them—Mahlon and Chilion; and so remained the women from her two sons and from her man.

Ruth
1:5

And also, both of them—Mahlon and Chilion—died; and the [two] women remained from her two sons and from her husband.

Also the woman's two sons, Mahlon and Chilion, died; and all that remained were the mother and her two daughters-in-law.

Obviously, this is quite tragic as well as somewhat of a play on words, since *Mahlon* means *sickly* and *Chilion* means *wasting away*. So that which was *sickly and wasting away* finally died. Then the author states all that remained of this woman's family were those who were not really her family, which is also somewhat of a play on words. Naomi had no husband to take care of her and no sons to take care of her. The husband she chose had died; and their two sons as well. Naomi was now a person in a hopeless situation. She was in a strange land and she had apparently had no close living relatives—that is, someone that she could move in with (she will not return to the family of her father when she goes back to Israel).

McGee, along with several others, suggest that this family of Israelites was disciplined by God for going to Moab and for marrying Moabite women. Just because they moved to a foreign country does not mean that they were under God's discipline during the time that they were there and just because they married Moabite women does not mean that they were under discipline. Just because the two sons die does not mean that God was disciplining them or Naomi. We just do not have enough information in order to warrant such an observation. Furthermore, it is not enough to look at the results (the deaths of the father and two sons) and impugn sin on the part of the family. Keep in mind, the ultimate results are that our Lord is illustrated in this book as the kinsman-redeemer of Israel and the Church and that Ruth is placed into the line of Christ. Whether this is a matter of God making all

⁷ "No Ammonite or Moabite will enter the assembly of Jehovah—none of their descendants, even to the tenth generation, will enter into the assembly of Jehovah, because they did not meet you with food and water on the way when you came out of Egypt; and because they hired against you Balaam ben Beor from Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse you." (Deut. 23:3–4).

things come out for good, even though the family made mistakes in the first place; or whether the family was operating within God's will are things about which we can only speculate, and unfairly so.

<<return to outline>>

Naomi chooses to leave Moab

And so arose she and her daughters-in-law and so she would turn back from fields of Moab for she heard in a field of Moab that visited Y^ehowah His people to give to them food.

Ruth
1:6

Then she arose—along with her daughters-in-law—and she planned to return from the country of Moab for she had heard in the country of Moab that Y^ehowah had looked after His people to give food to them.

Then she arose, along with her daughters-in-law, and planned to leave Moab, because she had heard while in Moab that Jehovah had looked after His people, removing the famine.

What she had heard that Jehovah had done was the Qal perfect of one of my favorite verbs in the Old Testament: pāqad (פָּקַד) [pronounced *paw-KAHD*], which means, in the Qal, *to visit, to have personal contact with, to sort out*. Strong's #6485 BDB #823. Israel would go through periods of time when it appeared as though God had nothing to do with them (e.g., during the time of their Egyptian slavery). And then, suddenly, it would become apparent that God was taking an active hand in dealing with Israel. These are the circumstances here. It first appeared as though God had stepped away from Israel with the famine; and now it appeared as though He was active in Israel, providing them with rain and therefore crops. Moab had brought this woman nothing but sorrow, and she had decided to return to Israel, in part because Jehovah had removed the famine. Throughout this book, the author acknowledges that Jehovah, the God of Israel is in control of certain events (Ruth 1:6, 13, 21 2:20 4:12–15). God has always taken care of His people (Gen. 50:24 Ex. 3:16 4:31 Psalm 132:15 Jer. 29:10 Zeph. 2:7 Luke 1:68). He has not cast them aside forever nor have they mysteriously mutated into the church.

One thing that you should note is that Naomi and the author correctly attribute blessing, as well as cursing, to the sovereign will of God (see Ruth 1:13, 21 2:20 4:12–15). In this, we have a better idea as to the purpose of this book. Here we find God's provision for the faithful during the darkest times of Israel. We will see that Naomi, a believer, is unhappy with what has happened to her, and blames this upon God. We do not have enough information which would allow us to pin any of the blame upon her. We are in a world ruled by Satan, and things happen to us which are difficult and painful, which we do not cause. God, in any case, ultimately allows these things to happen. Naomi recognizes this, but with relatively little bitterness. She does not appear to be a believer out of fellowship. She is a believer who has suffered unfathomable loss and has been brought to a point of hopelessness and helplessness. What has happened to her is nothing compared to Job, but far greater than most of us have experienced. In ten years time she suffered famine, had to move to a strange country, and then lost her husband and two sons, leaving her devoid of any close family. For her to feel great grief and pain during this time is normal human reaction, which is what we will observe later by implication. However, what is most important is that Naomi realizes that all of these things that have happened to her is a part of God's will. God will deal with her accordingly.

Naomi left with her husband and two daughters over a decade previous in search of food. As the NIV Study Bible put it, *Empty, Naomi returns to the newly filled land of promise.*⁸

And so she went out from the place where she was there and two of her daughters-in-law with her. And so they went in the way to turn back unto a land of Judah.

Ruth
1:7

Therefore, she went out from that place there where she was, along with her two daughters-in-law. So they went the way [or, the road] to return to the land of Judah.

⁸ *The NIV Study Bible*; ©1995 by The Zondervan Corporation; p. 362.

Therefore, she went out from that place where she was, along with her two daughters-in-law, and they took the road which went in the direction of Judah.

In the area where she lived, it was noised about that Judah was once again prosperous, so she, and her two daughters, got back on the road to return to Judah. So far, neither daughter-in-law has said anything about remaining in Moab. In fact, it is not clear whether they are going with her to Judah, or whether they are walking her to the border of Moab. No doubt, the three of them are struggling individually with that issue. For all intents and purposes, Naomi is in a hopeless, helpless situation, and both of her daughters-in-law realize that.

And so said Naomi to two of her daughters-in-law, “Go—return a woman to a house of her mother. May do Y^ehowah with you grace as how you do with the dying ones and with me.

Ruth
1:8

Then Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, “Go [and] return each [of you] to the house of her mother. May Y^ehowah deal [in] grace with you as you have done to the dead and to me.

Then Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, “Each of you should return to your mother’s home. May Jehovah deal graciously with you just as you have been gracious toward my sons and myself.

So far, the Hebrew has been fairly easy, and it has not become that much more difficult here. However, we will notice that the dialogue is a bit more difficult than the narrative in this book. There would be two reasons for this: Naomi and company have lived in Moab for ten years, so the way that they speak would have been affected. They might construct their sentences differently and they might use a slightly different vocabulary. Naomi’s daughters-in-law were Moabite women, so their native language is Moabite. Therefore, we should expect that some of what they will say will also require a closer examination. Let’s just see what some others have done with this verse:

NIV	Then Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, “Go back, each of you, to your mother’s home. May the LORD show kindness to you, as you have shown to your dead and to me.”
<i>Young’s Lit. Translation</i>	And Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, ‘Go, turn back, each to the house of her mother; Jehovah doth with you kindness as ye have done with the dead, and with me;...’

We have two Qal imperatives which are fairly easy. However, after the second verb, we have the feminine singular noun *ʾishshâh* (אִשְׁשָׁה) [pronounced *eesh-SHAWH*], which means *woman, wife*. This can be rendered as *each one* under certain circumstances (Ex. 11:2 Jer. 9:19). Strong’s #802 BDB #61. Her two-daughters-in-law have accompanied her to the border between Moab and Israel out of love and respect. Naomi has nothing more to offer these women. She gave them her sons, and now she no longer has sons or any means of support. Therefore, she urges them to return to their homeland and to the tent of their respective mothers. Barnes says that this indicates that the woman had a tent separate from her husband’s, which may or may not be true. He writes that the mention of the mother’s tent rather than the father’s would show more tact and tenderness under the circumstances and that this does not imply that their fathers have passed away.⁹

In the next thing that Naomi says, she uses the Qal imperfect, apocopated form of *ʿâsâh* (עָשָׂה) [pronounced *gaw-SAWH*] which means *to do, to make, to construct, to fashion, to form, to prepare*. Strong’s #6213 BDB #793. The apocopated form is used for the cohortative sense, which expresses volition. In the English, we often render this with *let* or *may*. This is followed by a the masculine singular noun *cheçed* (חֶסֶד) [pronounced *KHEH-sed*], which means *grace*. Strong’s #2617 BDB #338. It is used here almost like an adverb. The dying ones, of course, refers to her sons. This mother-in-law got along with her daughters-in-law. The two daughters-in-law have shown love and respect and grace to Naomi and to their husbands and Naomi asks that God give them the same grace.

⁹ *Barnes’ Notes, Volume 2*, reprinted 1996 by Baker Books; p. 473. That the father of Ruth was still alive is attested to in Ruth 2:11.

“Will give God to you and you [must] find rest a woman a house of her man.” And so she kissed to them And so they lifted up their voices and so they wept.

Ruth
1:9

“God will grant to you that you find a place of rest, each of you, a house of her husband.” Then she kissed them and they lifted up their voices and wept.

“God will see to it that each one of you finds another home with another husband.” Then she kissed them and they all cried.

It is interesting that what Naomi says is a very different style than the style of the writer. It is a tougher Hebrew to grapple with. Here is how other translators dealt with what she said:

NIV **“May the grant that each of you will find rest in the home of another husband.”**
Young's Lit. Translation **“Jehovah doth grant to you, and find ye rest each in the house of her husband;”**

She begins what she says with the 3rd person masculine singular, Qal imperfect of *to give, to grant*; and follows this with the subject *Jehovah* and the phrase *to you*. The difficult portion is we then have the wâw conjunction (which several translators render *that*) and the 2nd person feminine plural, Qal imperative of *to find*, followed by the feminine singular of *m^enûwchâh* (מנוחיה) [pronounced *m^e-noo-KHAI*], which means *rest, resting place, place of rest, quietness*. Strong's #4496 BDB #629. Naomi will, in Ruth 3:1, act on this wish for her daughter-in-law, Ruth.

It would have been difficult, but not impossible, for these women—the daughters-in-law—to find husbands again. When Naomi began by saying, *“God will give to you”* is not far from saying that it is God's will for this to come to pass. She follows this with an order for them to seek out a place of rest in the house of another husband.

And so they said to her, “For with you we will return, to your people.”

Ruth
1:10

They then said to her, “We will return with you to your people.”

They answered her, saying, “But we will return with you to your people.”

The only portion of this verse which is difficult is the beginning of what they say to her. They begin their sentence with the conjunction *kîy* (כִּי) [pronounced *kee*], which means *when, that, for, because*. Being a conjunction, the story is much more complex than this; however, my thinking is that they did use this word as women who not speak Hebrew fluently. In other words, that this is a problem with their Hebrew, rather than our understanding. Strong's #3588 BDB #471. What we have here is a kindness on their part, which is not necessarily heart-felt. After all, Naomi is an older woman who has no one to care for her and they say this to indicate that they would not desert her. This is a very unusual situation. These women undoubtedly have families in Moab who would take them back in; and there would be men from Moab that they could marry. It is quite unusual for their bond with Naomi, formed over the period of ten years, to rival that of their own families.

And so said Naomi, “Turn back, my daughters. For why will you go with me? Have yet to me sons in my womb and they have been to you for men?”

Ruth
1:11

And Naomi said, “Return, my daughters. Why would you go with me? Do I yet [have] to me sons in my womb that they will be as husbands for you?”

Naomi answered them, saying, “Please return, my daughters. Why would you go with me? Do I still have sons in my womb who would be husbands for you?”

There are two different words which we have used to refer to these women. In vv. 7–8, we have the feminine plural of *kallâh* (כַּלָּה) [pronounced *kahl-LAW*], which is rendered *daughter-in-law, spouse, wife*. We do not have an exact English equivalent as its translation depends upon who is speaking or who this is in reference to. It is an absolute noun which we only have relative nouns to stand in for it. Strong's #3618 BDB #483. The noun that

Naomi uses her is a stronger and more personal one. She uses the feminine plural of bath (בָּתַי) [pronounced *bahth*], which means *daughters*. Strong's #1323 BDB #123.

Naomi's question begins with the lamed prefixed preposition and the interrogative particle. Together, they are usually rendered *why*. Strong's #4100 BDB #552. The first half of the next sentence is without any verbs, which gives great emphasis to what she is saying. These are two young and attractive women, and she asks that they not burden themselves with her. She has nothing remaining to give them. She is not being sarcastic or insulting, but realistic. Naomi is referring to an ancient custom which, through Moses, became a part of Israelite Law. When a husband died without having fathered children, his brother was called upon to become her husband and to father her children (Gen. 38:8 Deut. 25:5–6). The first-born was to carry the first husband's name—this was a Law to Israel—so that he would inherit the land which belonged to his mother's first husband.¹⁰

This custom, which became a law, may seem a little odd to us, so let's look at it more carefully. First off, you should note that this did not occur very often. A young couple marries, the husband dies early on in the marriage, and the wife has no children. This is the scenario. Originally, in Oriental culture in general, if a young man died after being married but prior to impregnating his wife, his brother was called upon to become the husband of his sister-in-law. It is unclear whether already being married disqualified the man or not—Will Durant thinks not¹¹—however, most of the instances named in Scripture seem to indicate that we are dealing with an unmarried brother.¹² The term *brother* began with the nearest relative to the late husband,¹³ which would have been his brother, but, as we will see in the Book of Ruth, we are not confined to the brothers of the deceased—we then go to the nearest relatives. In Scripture, the terms *father*, *son* and *brother* are more loosely applied than we do in English. Now, Naomi mentions this by way of giving them reason not to accompany her back to Israel, but what this mention does is provide some literary foreshadowing. Naomi is saying that this ancient custom (also, a part of the Mosaic Law) could not be applied, yet it will come into play in the final two chapters of the Book of Ruth.

What we should understand in the beginning is that marriage was not as trivial in the ancient world as it has become today. Many people marry today with their fingers crossed, thinking, while at the altar, *if this guy [or, gal] turns out to be a jerk, I'll just divorce him*. A woman may have had multiple sex partners prior to marriage today and might even be carrying a lifelong sexually transmitted disease which she will give to her husband—and we think too little of this. In the ancient world, a woman who was not a virgin, but represented herself to be, and got married could find herself not only divorced the day after the wedding, but executed (Deut. 22:20–21). Priests were not even permitted to marry women who were not virgins (Lev. 21:13–14). A man who seduced a virgin was required to marry her, unless her father refused to allow them to marry (Ex. 22:16–17). My point in all of this is to stress that, once a woman was married, even if her husband died, it was difficult for her to be married again—not impossible, but very difficult. This custom, which was incorporated by Moses into the Mosaic Law, allowed a young woman assurance that she could marry again.

Our first exposure to the custom is in Gen. 38 when the first-born son of Judah, Er, was married to Tamar, but was killed early on by God for his evil. His brother, Onan, was told by his father, Judah, to impregnate Tamar. It is not expressly stated in Gen 38, however, apparently Onan was to take some responsibility for Tamar. Whether it was through a marriage or through some sort of support, it is unclear, as Onan did not mind having sex with Tamar, but he withdrew during the act so that he would not impregnate her. This custom was not designed so that the brothers of the deceased could simply have sex with his wife but that the woman's first-born (presumably, going by Deut. 25) would carry the name of the deceased husband. Eventually, Judah himself, the father, not the brother, *raised up seed*, as it were, and Tamar bore him twins. There is more to the story than that (we will cover it in more detail in Ruth 4:12), but, interestingly enough (1) Judah did not have sex with Tamar again (Gen. 38:26); (2) it is unclear as to whether Judah *married* Tamar or not; we may reasonably expect that he provided for her and

¹⁰ This Law is the subject of a discussion which Jesus had with the Sadducees in Matt. 22:23–28 Mark 12:18–27 Luke 20:27–33.

¹¹ *The Story of Civilization; Volume I Our Oriental Heritage*; Will Durant; MJF Books; ©1963; p. 336.

¹² The end of Gen. 38 being the conspicuous exception.

¹³ We are genetically closer to other brothers and sisters than we are to our parents or to our children.

raised her children in his house (or, at least on his property); and, (3) the line of Jesus runs through Judah and Tamar (Matt. 1:3). Obviously, it is difficult to explain an ancient tradition in the light of one example.

Moses incorporated this ancient custom into Law in Deut. 25:5–6. It is interesting how it is phrased: “When brothers live together and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the deceased will not be married outside to a strange man. Her husband’s brother will go in to her and take her to himself as a wife and perform the duty of a husband’s brother to her. And it will come to pass that when the first-born is raised, that he will take the name of the dead brother, so that his name is not blotted out from Israel.” First, we are dealing with brothers who live together. The Hebrew understanding of the word *brother* would certainly allow for another close relative to obey this law. The near relative could refuse and the widowed wife could force the issue to some degree. She could at least have the small satisfaction of publically humiliating him if he refused to marry her (Deut. 25:7–9). This law does not address the issue of near relatives who did not live with the deceased husband.¹⁴ What we should not lose sight of is that it was the permanence of the land inheritance which this law illustrated and allowed for. The important factor is that, what God gives is permanent and eternal. He has given land to every man of Israel and that land is to remain with his family forever. This law (along with the laws regarding the Year of Redemption), simply insure the permanence of a man’s God-given inheritance.

Now, an interesting transgression is that the Levites were not under this provision of the Law. First of all, they had no land inheritance. For that reason, this law would not apply. However, in Lev. 21:1–4, the priest (the Aaronic branch of the Levites) was not subject to this law and the High Priest was to only marry a virgin (Lev. 21:10, 13).

The final allusion to the Levirate marriage is found in Matt. 22:23–28, and it is the background of a question to Jesus raised by the Sadducees. They quote Deut. 25:3, and then ask Jesus if a man dies, and his wife marries his brother, and he dies, and she marries the next brother, until the seventh brother—and all of the brothers die, then who is the woman married to in heaven? It goes without saying that the woman won’t stand married to seven men throughout eternity. The idea that they would ask such a question is humorous, as Matthew points out, because they do not even believe in the resurrection. Jesus answers their question (which answer is, there are no marriages in the resurrection), but then deals with their unbelief with regards to resurrection in Matt. 22:31–32: “But regarding the resurrection of the dead, have you not read that which was spoken to you by God, saying, ‘I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? God is not God of the dead but of the living.”

What we will see in the Book of Ruth is that, in this law, God also provides for the security of the widow as well. Once a woman is no longer a virgin, it is more difficult for her to get married again, and, therefore, her basic day-to-day sustenance is jeopardized. In the case of Naomi and her daughters-in-law, Naomi was obviously not going to get married again, due to her age, and it would have been difficult for her daughters-in-law to find husbands as well.

Let me go off on a tangent here. Some maintain that there is a conflict between the Levirate marriage and Lev. 18:16, which reads: “You will not uncover the nakedness of your brother’s wife; it is your brother’s nakedness.” What is being referred to here is sex with the wife of a relative. However, we have no conflict, as this applies to the case when the relatives are all alive.

Then next two verses are really messed up. They could not have been divided up more poorly. Either that, or vv. 12–13 should be presented as one verse. The first part of v. 12 should be cut off after the first phrase, and the second part of this verse affixed to v. 13, as Ruth sets up an hypothetical situation in v. 12 and then resolves it in v. 13a. Part of the problem is that the Hebrew is quite difficult.

¹⁴ Nor does it deal with *what if the deceased husband lived with an uncle, but he still has a brother, living elsewhere, who is alive—who takes the woman in marriage, the brother or the uncle?* Just bear in mind that we are dealing with a very rare situation to begin with. To go into greater detail would be making a law for less than 1% of 1% of the population of Israel. You never make laws for 1% of 1% of the population.

“Turn back, my daughters—go, for I am old from to be to a man that I said, exists to me hope.

Ruth
1:12a

“Return, my daughters, go, for I have become old from having a[nother] husband, even [if] I have said, there is to me hope.

“Return, my daughters, to your home. I am too old to have another husband; I am too old to say that I still have hope.

Again, the Hebrew of the narrative is simple. What Naomi says is complex Hebrew. Let me give you various translations of the first half of this verse:

NASB	“Return, my daughters! Go, for I am too old to have a husband. If I said, I have hope,...
NKJV	“Turn back, my daughters, go—for I am too old to have a husband. If I should say I have hope,...”
NIV	“Return, my daughters; I am too old to have another husband. Even if I thought there was still hope for me—”
Owen's Translation	Turn back, my daughters, go your way, for I am too old to have a husband. If I should say I have hope—...
Young's Lit. Translation	Turn back, my daughters, go, for I am too aged to be to a husband; though I had said, There is for me hope,...

The NIV and the NASB give the best sense of what she is saying, although their renderings are not the most literal, word-for-word. The third verb is the Qal perfect of *zâqên* (זָקַנְתִּי) [pronounced *zaw-KANE*], which means *to become old, to become aged*. Strong's #2204 BDB #278. This is followed by the preposition *min* (מִן) [pronounced *min*], a preposition which denotes separation (*away from, out from, out of from*). Strong's #4480 BDB #577. This is followed by the Qal infinitive construct of *hâyâh* (הָיָה) [pronounced *haw-YAW*], which means *to be*. Strong's #1961 BDB #224. And this is followed by *to a man* or *for a man*. That phrase is, literally, *from to be for a man*. When *to be* is followed by the lamed preposition, possession is often the sense, which is why *hâyâh* is occasionally rendered *to have*. We could get away with rendering this *from having a[nother] husband*. What we have so far is: **“Return, my daughters, go—for I have become old from having another husband.”**

For the second time in v. 12, we have the preposition *kîy* (כִּי) [pronounced *kee*] again, which means *when, that, for, because*. Sometimes it has an intensifying force and is rendered *so that, so even, even*. Strong's #3588 BDB #471. Although there is nothing radically wrong with the translations which begin with *if* or *though*, this is actually incorrect. We completely lose the what she has said to these gals before. Naomi is reiterating something which she has said to them before. This is followed by the Qal perfect of *to say*, which would be rendered *For I have said*. I don't know of a single translation which correctly renders this portion of the verse. Even Keil and Delitzsch get this wrong, and there is no excuse for them not to impress upon us the difficulty of the translation at this point.

Then we have the substantive *yêsh* (יֵשׁ) [pronounced *yaysh*], which means *being, substance, existence*. We often render this *there is*, even though *there is* no verb. Strong's #3426 BDB #441. This is followed by *to me* and then the substantive *hope, expectation*. This gives us: **“Turn back, my daughters—go, for I am old from to be to a man that I said, exists to me hope.”** Or, less literally, **“Return, my daughters, go, for I have become old from having a[nother] husband, even [that] I have said, there is to me hope.”**

How to deal with this phrase was a quiet struggle which most translators grappled—a struggle that you were completely unaware of. There are two different hypothetical particles, neither of which is found here. They are different enough from *kîy* so that there would be no way to mix them up.

“Also I am the night a man and also I bear sons, will, therefore, you wait until when they will grow strong; will therefore, you refrain to not be for a man?”

Ruth
1:12b–13a

“Furthermore, I have been this night to a husband and I have borne sons, will you, therefore, wait until they have grown up; will you, therefore, remain celibate to not be for a man?”

“Even if I had a husband and that I bore sons this night, would you wait until they grew up and remained unmarried until then?”

Let’s see how some other translations have tied vv. 12b–13a together:

NASB	“If I said I have hope, if I should even have a husband tonight and also bear sons, would you therefore wait until they were grown? Would you therefore refrain from marrying?”
NKJV	“If I should say I have hope, if I should have a husband tonight and should also bear sons, would you wait for them till they were grown? Would you restrain yourselves from having husbands?”
<i>Young’s Lit. Translation</i>	...though I had said, There is for me hope, also, I have been to-night to a husband, and also, I have borne sons: for them do ye wait till yourselves up, not to be to a husband?

We actually begin with gam (גַּם) [pronounced *gahm*], which means *also, furthermore, in addition to, moreover*. Strong’s #1571 BDB #168. And then we have the 1st person singular, Qal perfect of *to be* again. Afterwards, we have, literally, [*furthermore, I have*] *the night for a man and also I have borne sons*. Now, when gam is repeated, as it is here, then it is rendered *both...and, furthermore...as well as, also...also, that...so*. Then we have *I have borne sons*, giving us, literally, **“Also I am the night a man and also I bear sons,...** We can clean this up slightly and have, when we include the previous verse portion: **“Return, my daughters, go; for I have become old from having a[nother] husband that I have said, there is to me a hope, both I have been this night to a husband and I have borne sons,...** I hope that you recognize that the translation of this verse is not easy or straightforward, unlike the narrative in the previous verses in this chapter.

This gist of this is that she is setting up an hypothetical situation: “Let’s just say that I both had a husband and bore two children just tonight.” (which, of course, is the best case scenario). Now, as we have seen many times in the past, this verse has been split up at the worst possible place. That this thought is continued in the next verse, and whoever split this up did a great disservice to the continuity.

In the beginning of v. 13, which is a continuation of v. 12, we have the interrogative particle and the conjunction *lâhên* (לְהֵן) [pronounced *law-HAYN*], which conjunction is found here (and in Dan. 2:6, 9 4:24), and it is found twice. I suspect that the conjunction is Moabite or Moabitic Hebrew. The fact that it is found in Daniel, which is Aramaic (bastardized Hebrew), makes it more likely to be a conjunction which is not standard fare for the Hebrew. The NASB renders it *therefore*; the KJV and the NKJV essentially ignores them. Strong’s #3860 & #3861 BDB #530. There is the possibility that the vowel point after the lâmed is messtup and that this is simply the 3rd person feminine plural pronoun or the demonstrative adverb *behold* or *lo* preceded by a lâmed prefixed preposition. It is hard to make *for them [feminine]* to make sense in this verse; however, in the latter case, the demonstrative adverb is also used as a hypothetical particle, which is a possibility, but even that is unwieldy.

At this point, we have, finally, an easy verb to deal with: the 2nd person feminine plural, Piel imperfect of *sâb* (סָבַ) [pronounced *sah^b-VAWR*], which means *to wait, to hope, to wait for, to hope for*. Strong’s #7563 BDB #960. With the interrogative particle and the conjunction *therefore*, we have, *would you therefore wait for...* This is followed by *until when* [or, *who, which*] and the 3rd person masculine plural, Qal imperfect of *gâdal* (גָּדַל) [pronounced *gaw-DAWHL*], which, in the Qal, means *to grow strong, to become great, to grow up, to become mighty*. Strong’s #1431 BDB #152.

We now repeat the interrogative particle and the odd conjunction and then add the 2nd person feminine plural, Niphal imperfect of *ʿâgan* (אָגַן) [pronounced *aw-GAHN* or *gaw-GAHN*], which means *to shut oneself in, to shut*

oneself off. This verb is found only here. It could even have a more exotic meaning, as in *to remain in a state of celibacy*; we are only making guesses. You may wonder, what do we do when there are no cognates, no similar words in other languages? Often, we simply follow the lead of the Septuagint and any other early translation of this passage. Strong's #5702 BDB #723.

Then we have the lamed preposition (*to, for*), the negative, and the Qal infinitive construct of *to be*. Then we have *for a man*. This gives us: *will you remain celibate, to not be for a man?*

Now let's put all of this together: "Turn back, my daughters—go, for I am old from to be to a man that I said, exists to me hope. Also I am the night a man and also I bear sons—will, therefore, you wait until when they will grow strong; will therefore, you refrain to not be for a man?" Or, let's smooth it out a little: "Return, my daughters, go, for I have become old from having a[nother] husband, even [if] I have said, there is to me hope. Furthermore, I have been this night to a husband and I have borne sons, will you, therefore, wait until they have grown up; will you, therefore, remain celibate to not be for a man?"

What is quite interesting is that throughout the quoted portion of this Scripture, we have run into a slew of words which we have not found in the previous seven books of Scripture. Given that Naomi has lived in Moab for the past ten years and that these two daughters-in-law are natives of Moab, it would only make sense that some of the words that they used would be more rare to Scripture.

Now, Naomi tells her daughters-in-law to return to Moab—they have followed her to the border. She is too old to have another husband, even if she had told them before that she had some hope or expectation of remarriage. Then she sets up an hypothetical situation without using the hypothetical particle, and then draws a conclusion by asking them some pointed questions. She assumes that she finds this night a husband who impregnates her—will they wait until these children are grown before they marry? Now, on the surface, to those of you who read through your entire Bibles in one year, this probably sounds pretty stupid. Why would Naomi say this? She is saying this because there is a custom which became a part of the Mosaic Law that, when a woman's husband dies prior to bearing children, his brother is to marry her, impregnate her, and then raise the first child up under the name of the late husband. This was known as a *Levirate marriage*. Naomi is simply saying that is just an unlikely scenario. This custom/law is not something which can be reasonably applied even if she married and got pregnant that very night. It is not a goofy thing to say back then, because it refers to a common custom and to an Israelite law. If a mother-in-law said it today, that would be a goofy thing to say.

"No, my daughters, because he is bitter to me exceedingly from you [all] that has gone out in me a hand of Y^ehowah.

Ruth
1:13b

"No, my daughters, it is extremely bitter to me from you that the hand of Y^ehowah would go out against me."

"No, my daughters, this would be wrong for me to expect that, particularly as the hand of Jehovah has gone out against me."

The last portion of this verse is relatively simple; here is what others have done.

NASB "No, my daughters; for it is harder [Lit., more bitter] for me than for you, for the hand of the LORD has gone forth against me."

NIV "No, my daughters, it is more bitter for me than for you, because the LORD's hand has gone out against me!"

Owen's Translation "No, my daughters, it is exceedingly bitter to me for your sake that the hand of Yahweh has gone forth against me."

Young's Lit. Translation 'nay, my daughters, for more bitter to me than to you, for the hand of Jehovah hath gone out against me.'

The second verb we will examine is the 3rd person masculine singular, Qal perfect of *mârar* (מָרַר) [pronounced *maw-RAHR*], and its meaning is given as *to embitter, to make bitter*. Strong's #4843 BDB #600. There is nothing nearby which appears to be the subject of this verb; therefore, it is proper to use the more indefinite *it*.

Naomi, in view of the decimation of her family, also points out that the hand of God is against her. It was understood in the ancient world that God did not just bring to them happiness and sunshine. Naomi recognized that, for whatever reason, God's hand seemed to be against her. This is in agreement with Judges 2:15, which gives us a summary of the time of the judges where God's hand was against Israel in general. Naomi's cursing is for blessing, whereas the cursing against Israel in general during that time period was for discipline. For similar expressions, see also Job 19:21 Psalm 32:4 38:2.

<<return to outline>>

Naomi returns to Judah with her daughter-in-law, Ruth

And so they lifted up their voices and so they wept again and so Orpah kissed to her mother-in-law and Ruth clung in her.

Ruth
1:14

Then they again lifted up their voices and cried. Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her.

Then they again cried aloud. Orpah kissed her mother-in-law but Ruth clung to her.

Again, we are back into the narrative, which means that the Hebrew is much more straightforward. We have all three women crying aloud, and Orpah kisses her mother goodbye. Lawson: *They wept because they were to part, never again to meet, al of them, together in this world. They had been happy in one another, and one of the sorest afflictions incident to this life, is the everlasting separation of those who are mutually dead.*¹⁵

Ruth continues to cling to Naomi. McGee: *Ruth and Orpah demonstrate the two kinds of members in the Church—the professors and the possessors. Orpah made only a profession of faith, and there was failure at the climactic moment; Ruth possessed genuine faith, and it produced fruit.*¹⁶

Prior to the crucifixion, the relationship of God to people outside of Israel was interesting. God worked specifically within the nation Israel, although anyone could come to Israel and trust upon their God. We find this illustrated in the New Testament as well. **A Canaanite woman came out from that region [of Tyre and Sidon], and cried out, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is cruelly demon-possessed." But He did not answer her a word. And His disciples came to Him and kept asking Him, saying, "Send her away, for she is shouting out after us." But He answered and said, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." But she came and prostrated herself before Him, saying, "Lord, help me!" And He answered and said, "It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." But she said, "Yes, Lord; but even the dogs feed on the crumbs which fall from their master's table." Then Jesus answered and said to her, "Woman, your faith is great; be it done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed at once** (Matt. 15:22–28). You will note, as we continue, how closely our narrative parallels what Jesus said to this woman a thousand years later.

And so she said, "Behold, turned back your sister-in-law unto her people and unto her gods. Turn back after your sister-in-law."

Ruth
1:15

Then she [Naomi] said, "Listen, you sister-in-law is returning to her people and to her gods. Return after your sister-in-law."

Then Naomi observed, "Listen, dear, your sister is returning to her people and to her gods. You should follow your sister."

The two women are related insofar as they are both Moabites and they both married into the same family. Therefore, they are properly called *sisters-in-law*. It is obvious that Orpah is going to return to her people—and thus, remain in Moab (they might be at the border at this point). It is an odd inducement that Naomi holds out to Ruth—her sister is returned to her people and to her gods. However, Ruth does not appear inclined to return to her people or to *her* gods. What Naomi has said to them is similar to what Joshua told his people only a few

¹⁵ Lawson and Carson, *An Exposition of Ruth and Esther*; ©Tyndale Bible Society, Florida; p. 13.

¹⁶ J. Vernon McGee, *Ruth, the Romance of Redemption*; Thru the Bible Books, ©Pasadena, California, p. 50.

decades earlier: “Choose for yourselves today whom you will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living.” (Joshua 24:15b).

Some might question what Naomi is doing here. After all, if Naomi believes in the One True God, what is she doing suggesting to her daughters-in-law to return to the false gods of Moab? What Naomi says recognizes human volition. Ruth and Orpah are grown women who have the ability to determine what path they will choose for themselves. Recall that Jesus was approached by a scribe who said that he would follow Jesus. Jesus told him, “The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.” (Matt. 8:20b). This is not a word of encouragement. Jesus simply made it clear what this man was in for. Naomi has done the same thing. Naomi has just made it completely clear that she personally has nothing whatsoever to offer these young women. When Judas was about to betray Jesus, Jesus said to him, “Friend, do what you have come for.” (Matt. 26:50b). Jesus was not suggesting that this betrayal was the right thing to do. He simply told Judas to get it over with.

And so said Ruth, “You will not entreat to me to leave you—to turn back from after you, for unto where you go, I go and in where you lodge, I lodge. You people, my people and your God, my God.

Ruth
1:16

And so Ruth said, “Do not entreat me to leave you [or] to turn back from following you, for where you go, I will go and where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people [will be] my people and your God [is] my God.

Then Ruth asserted, “Please do not try to talk me into leaving you or to turn back from following you. Where you go, I will go; where you live, I will live. Your people will be my people and your God will be my God.

The first verb that Ruth uses is the 2nd person feminine singular, Qal imperfect of *pāga* (פָּגַעַת) [pronounced *paw-GAHG*], which means *to fall upon, to meet, to encounter, to reach* in the Qal and *to cause to light upon, to make entreaty, to interpose*. Strong’s #6293 BDB #803. With this word is the negative. With this, we have probably the most known and quoted verse from this little book of Ruth. During the time period that they had spent together, Ruth and the family of her mother-in-law, there was something which attracted Ruth to this family—obviously, the son at first, but there was another quality which was strictly a part of this family. There is a witness of the life of a believer, apart from giving someone the gospel every five minutes; and this witness is often far more important than your poor and often inaccurate explanation of the gospel of God. The testimony of the life of Naomi, particularly given the tragedy which struck her life. Ruth chose the company of Naomi over the company of her own people; and, more importantly, the God of Israel over the god of Moab. This is her testimony, which is a testimony of faith in Jehovah God, the True God of the Universe. This entire context makes it clear that there is nothing in this for her from the stance of human viewpoint. Naomi clearly has nothing of this earthly realm to offer Ruth—however, Ruth is still willing to forsake her country and the gods of her country to join in what appears to be a life of desolation for Naomi.

We don’t know exactly how Naomi’s family worshipped God or what they knew or didn’t know. Ruth was certainly able to observe how they dealt with personal tragedy as the father and sons one-by-one died. It was well-known to all peoples what God had done in Egypt and that may have had some impact on Ruth’s thinking, although that had occurred perhaps a century previous. My thinking is that the events of this book took place while Israel was paying tribute to Moab—and Moab’s domination at any recent point in time would have factored into Ruth’s thinking. We don’t know if Moab practiced human sacrifice at this time or not—I personally doubt that this was the case, as human sacrifice was an activity practiced by the most degenerate of the mid-eastern peoples. Whatever the reasons, Ruth’s preference was to remain with Naomi and her God.

It needs to be clear in your mind that this was more than just a simple choice that, *I’d rather hang with you than my own family*. There is an indication that Ruth can return with Orpah to their family—and we may reasonably infer that she would be taken care of by her family. Ruth is making a clear choice to go with Naomi and to follow and obey the God of Naomi, and the verse which follows supports this.

“In where you die, I will die and there I will be buried—so will do Y^ehowah to me and so will He [cause to] add, for the death causes a separation between me and you.”

Ruth
1:17

“Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried—in this manner, Y^ehowah will do to me and in that manner He will cause [things] to continue; for [only] death will separate me from you.”

“Where you die, I will die, and there I also will be buried. May Jehovah do this to me and may He continue to uphold my vow; only death will separate us.”

We will definitely need to look at the other translations here:

NASB	“Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. Thus may the LORD do to me, and worse, if <i>anything but</i> death parts you and me.”
NIV	“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.”
NJB	‘Where you die, I shall die and there I shall be buried. Let Yahweh bring unnameable ills on me and worse ills, too, if anything but death should part me from you!’
NKJV	‘Where you die, I will die. And there I will be buried. The LORD do so to me, and more also, <i>if anything but</i> death parts you and me.’
Owen's Translation	“Where you die I will die and there will I be buried. May Yahweh do so to me and more also if even death parts me from you.”
Young's Lit. Translation	‘Where thou diest I die, and there I am buried; thus doth Jehovah to me, and thus doth He add—for death itself doth part between me and thee.’

The first half of this verse is fairly straightforward. In the second half of the verse, we have adverb *kôh* used twice. *Kôh* (כֹּה) [pronounced *koh*], means *so, thus, here, hence*, and *kôh* is the key to understanding this verse. When it is used twice, it means *in this manner...in that manner*. Strong's #3541 BDB #462. Because of the translation of the NJB, I should point out that the first verb applied to God is the Qal imperfect of *ʿâsâh* (עָשָׂה) [pronounced *gaw-SAWH*] which simply means *to do, to make, to construct, to fashion, to form, to prepare*. Strong's #6213 BDB #793. The second verb which applies to God is the Hiphil imperfect of *yâçaph* (יָצַח) [pronounced *yaw-SAHPH*], which means *to add, to augment, to continue to do a thing*. The Hiphil is the causative stem. Strong's #3254 BDB #414. Although this is a phrase which may imply what we find in the NASB or in the NJB; it does not mean that literally. This is probably the colloquial meaning. We find this same saying in I Sam. 3:17 14:44 20:13 25:22 II Sam. 3:9, 35 19:13 I Kings 2:23 19:2 20:10 II Kings 6:31, where taking this saying in the sense of the NASB and the NJB is quite reasonable. It appears as though this statement invokes a curse on the one speaking if he does not carry through with his vow, even though we do not actually have any words which, in and of themselves, carry a negative connotation. In any case, Ruth is taking an oath by Jehovah, the God of Israel. She is stating that she and Naomi would remain joined at the hip, so to speak, throughout the remainder of their lives, and she prays that God would both do this as well as allow this to continue to be the case.

In the last phrase, we have the conjunction *kîy*, again, (כִּי) [pronounced *kee*], which means *when, that, for, because*. Strong's #3588 BDB #471. This is definitely **not** the hypothetical particle *if*, which is *ʿîm* (אִם) [pronounced *eem*]. Strong's #518 BDB #49. This is followed by *mâveth* (מָוֶת) [pronounced *MAW-veth*], which means *death*. Strong's #4194 BDB #560. This is followed by the 3rd person masculine singular, Hiphil imperfect of *pârar* (פָּרַד) [pronounced *paw-RAHD*], which means *to divide, to part, to separate*. Strong's #6504 BDB #825. We have the preposition *bêyn* used twice after this. *Bêyn* (בֵּין) [pronounced *bane*], when found twice corresponds most closely to our word *between*. Strong's #996 BDB #107. Ruth says that only death separate them. Also, don't read too much into that. Ruth is simply saying that when Naomi dies, then she and Naomi will be separated—she is not speaking in the eternal sense of both of them being dead and separated.

In all, Ruth has made a sevenfold decision. First of all, where Naomi went, she would go. Naomi was returning to Israel, so Ruth would return to Israel. When Naomi lived, Ruth would live. Ruth was not simply moving to Israel because of the end of the famine, but she tells Naomi that she will live with her. “Your people will be my people.” Ruth no longer would identify herself as a Moabite, but she would consider herself an Israelite, adopting the

customs and the laws of the Israelites. “Your God will be my God.” Most importantly, the God of Israel, the God of Naomi, Jehovah, the God of the Universe, would be Ruth’s God. She recognized His great power and protection. “Where you die, I will die.” Ruth is so identifying herself with Naomi, that she will be completely a part of her life. She will not return to Moab once Naomi passes. She will remain in Israel, where Naomi has lived, and she will live in Israel for the remainder of her life. Ruth makes a lifelong commitment here. Sixth, wherever Naomi is finally buried, Ruth will choose to be buried there as well. McGee: *What she’s saying is this, “The hope of Israel is my hope.” You see, the Israelite believed that someday he would be raised from the dead to live in the land. That was the hope of Abraham. He never believed that he was going to heaven. He believed he would be raised from the dead right down here, and that’s the reason he bought the cave of Machpelah and buried Sarah there, and he himself was buried there.*¹⁷ Joseph, his great grandson, became an Egyptian ruler, and still commanded that his body not be buried in Egypt, but carried back to the land which God had promised Abraham. Finally, Ruth vowed that Jehovah God, the God of Israel, do to her and more also, if anything other than death parted she and Naomi.

When Paul had written to the Corinthians, some of them had become distressed and even sorrowful because of some of the things which he wrote. He responded with: **For the sorrow, according to [the norms and standards of] God, produces a change of mind [which is] salvation, [which is] not to be regretted; however, the sorrow of the world produces death** (II Cor. 7:10). Too many people associate this verse with tears and repentance, a word that 90% of the Christian population do not understand. Both Orpah and Ruth cried with Naomi. Tears, even when faced with the gospel, does not mean anything. A person who cries when hearing the gospel and dedicates him or herself to God may or may not be saved. When these tears are in accordance with God’s norms and standards, then they result in a change of mind (which is *repentance*) which is salvation. Let me make that clear: you are not changing your mind about your sins; you are not changing your mind about serving God—you are changing your mind upon where you place your trust. If your sorrow leads to a faith which is on the finished work of Christ, then that is a repentance, or a change of mind, which is in accordance with the norms and standards of God. If your sorrow leads you simply to a point where you eschew your sins and dedicate your life to serving God, and that your faith is still upon yourself and your works, then that is the sorrow of the world which produces death.

McGee adds: *A lot of people come to a place where they’re under conviction, and they intend to change—or at least they say they do—and they shed a few tears, but they keep right on going the same way. And that’s exactly what Orpah did. She shed the tears right along with Ruth, but she didn’t turn around and go to Bethlehem and make a stand for God. No, she went back to idolatry. And a lot of folk are like that today—they just shed tears. Tears are not repentance, friend, although they may be a by-product of repentance.*¹⁸

McGee continues: *My Dad used to tell about a steamboat which plied on the Mississippi River years ago when he was a boy. He said it had a little, bitty boiler and a great big whistle. When this boat was moving upstream and blew its whistle, it would start drifting downstream, because it didn’t have enough steam to do both. There are a lot of folk like that today. They have a great big whistle and a little, bitty boiler. They have never come to a saving knowledge of Christ. Oh, they’ll shed a lot of tears over their sins—they blow their whistle—and they’re very emotional. They love to give testimonies full of emotion, but their lives don’t measure up. I know several men who can make people weep when they get up and give their testimonies. They have tears in their voice, but I wouldn’t trust those men at all. I don’t think they’re born-again men at all, just emotional, that’s all. They are like Orpah.*¹⁹

And so she saw that strengthening herself to go with her; and so she ceased to speak to her.

Ruth
1:18

And when she saw she remained firm to go with her, she ceased to speak to her.

¹⁷ J. Vernon McGee, *Ruth*, Thru the Bible Radio, ©1976 in La Verne, California, p. 22.

¹⁸ J. Vernon McGee, *Ruth*, Thru the Bible Radio, ©1976 in La Verne, California, p. 23.

¹⁹ J. Vernon McGee, *Ruth*, Thru the Bible Radio, ©1976 in La Verne, California, p. 23.

And when it became apparent that she was not to be dissuaded, Naomi stopped trying to convince her to depart.

The second verb is the Hithpael participle of *ʾâmêtz* (אָמֵץ) [pronounced *aw-MATES*], and this word means *to be strong, firm, stout, bold, alert*. The Hithpael means *to harden oneself, to strengthen oneself, to be of a firm mind*. Strong's #553 BDB #54. Once Naomi realized that she was not to be dissuaded from coming with her, Naomi stopped trying to convince her otherwise. This certainly does not mean that they continued the rest of their journey in absolute silence.

One of the peculiarities of Scripture, if you will, is the fact that we will often see two in a family, and one will choose one direction, and one will choose the other, and we follow one of them. We will never hear about Orpah, this sister of Ruth again. In Scripture, we will follow Ruth, and those in succeeding generations all the way to the book of Matthew. Scripture follows out the family of Seth, not Cain; it follows Abraham, not Nahor or Lot; it follows Jacob, not Esau. Wherever there is a fork in the road, Scripture will take one turn, not both.

And so went two of them until a coming in of them to Bethlehem. And so he was as a coming in of them was being stirred an entire the town over them, and so they say, “Is this Naomi?”

Ruth
1:19

So the two of them went until their entering of Bethlehem and it was, as their entering, the entire town was stirred because of them. And they [the women of the town] said, “Is this Naomi?”

So the two of them continued until their came to Bethlehem. As they entered, the entire town was stirred up because of them. The women of the town kept asking, “Is this Naomi?”

The gist of this verse is fairly easy to get. There are a few nuances of the Hebrew that we will cover. We have two very common verbs to begin this verse; first, the 3rd person feminine plural, Qal imperfect of *to go, to come, to walk*. Then we have the preposition *until* and the Qal infinitive construct of *to come in, to enter, to go in*. Affixed to this is 3rd person feminine plural suffix, so together, they are literally *until a coming in of them* or *until their entering of*; we often render it something like *until they came to*, which is actually representative of a slightly different construction of the same Hebrew words. We have this repeated with the kaph preposition this time, which referred to *as their entering of* or *when they entered*.

Another stumbling block for you may be the very literal way which I rendered *and so stirred an entire the town...* The verb is simply the feminine singular, Niphal imperfect of *hûwm* (הוּמ) [pronounced *hoom*], which means *to murmur, to roar, to discomfit, to cause a stir, to cause a disturbance*. Strong's #1949 BDB #223. Now, although the Niphal is the passive of the Qal stem, it can also refer to an action in a state of progress or development; therefore we add in the word *being*.

This is followed by, literally, *a whole of the town*. *Whole* (or, *entire*)²⁰ does not take a definite article because it is in the construct state. However, since *town* is the word it is tied to and *town* has the definite article, it is good and proper to place the definite article prior to *whole* or *entire*.

The final verb is in the feminine plural and refers to the women of the town. This was the city from which Naomi had come, and she had been gone for about ten years. She was apparently very well-known. What the women say actually does not contain a verb, but begins with a question mark, and then *this, Naomi?*

And so she says unto them, “You are not calling me Naomi; call me Mara, for caused bitterness [the] Almighty to me exceedingly.

Ruth
1:20

Then she answered them, “You will not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has caused me to become extremely embittered.

²⁰ We often use *entire* when affixed to a singular noun.

Then she answered them, “Please, do not call me Naomi [or, pleasant], but call me Mara [bitterness] instead, for the Almighty has caused me to become extremely embittered.

One of the very goofy things which I recall about one particular cult is that they would all change their names, as they would point toward various peoples whose names were changed (Abram to Abraham, Saul to Paul, and here we have Naomi to Mara. However, in the first two cases (and there are others), *God* assigned these the new name; in the case of Naomi, this is simply a play on words. Her name means *pleasant* and *Mara* means *bitter*. She is making a statement. When you ask someone *how are you* and then they answer you the truth, you are sometimes caught off guard. This is what Naomi is doing—she is telling these women how she really feels.

Several times in this chapter, we have found an incongruous play on words. Naomi and her family leave the *house of bread* because there is a famine in that city (v. 1). The names of the sons who died in their youth were named *sickly* and *wasting away* (vv. 2, 5). Then, in v. 5, it says that *all that remained of Naomi’s family were Ruth and Orpah* (and they were really not her family). Here, she asks those who recognize her to call her *bitter*, rather than *pleasant* (or, *Mara* rather than *Naomi*). It is odd to have this playfulness of language in a story that is so tragic; and I really don’t have an explanation for it.

The verb is the Hiphil perfect of *mârar* (מָרַר) [pronounced *maw-RAHR*], and its meaning is given as *to embitter, to make bitter*. This doesn’t give the whole story of this verb. Originally, this word meant *to flow, to drop*; from this word comes *myhrr*, which is so called because of its distillation process. In the Qal, this means *to be sad, to grieve, to weep tears of sadness, to be so grieved as to become embittered*. The flowing has to do with the flowing of tears. As we know, great grief and sadness can lead to bitterness. In the Hiphil, it means *to be caused to be sad, to weep tears of introspective grief*. Strong’s #4843 BDB #600. For the subject of the verb, she does not use the normal name for *God* or *Jehovah*, but she uses the name *shadday* (שַׁדַּי) [pronounced *shahd-DAH-ee*], which is generally translated *Almighty, the Almighty One*. Some render this *the many-breasted one* as the word for *breast* in the Hebrew is *shad* (שֶׁד) [pronounced *shahd*] (Strong’s #7699 BDB #994) and there are two or three other words in the Hebrew related to *breast* which have the same root. What is involved here is provision, ability to provide, care and love. This is actually a rather unusual name for *God*. We find it in the Pentateuch and in the book of Job. It is only found twice in the Psalms and four times in the books of the prophets (where we would expect to see it a lot).

However, let me also point out that the word for *to do violence to* is *shâdad* (שָׁדַד) [pronounced *shah-DAHD*] (Strong’s #7703 BDB #994). Therefore, we have the inference of dealing violently; and this would make sense. A mother will provide and protect her own, to the point of committing serious violence, if necessary. *God* does the same. For those who constantly reject him, for those who put their hands on His people—those are on the receiving end of His violence. This is a most marvelous name for *God*, revealing two important, yet superficially contradictory, characteristics. Naomi uses this noun, referring to *God’s* power for violence against man.

“I—full—went out and empty has brought me back Y^ehowah. For why do you call me Naomi, and God has answered against me and the Almighty has caused evil to me?”

Ruth
1:21

“I went out full and Y^ehowah has brought me back empty. Why do you call me Naomi, when God has testified against me and the Almighty has caused me evil?”

“When I left here, I was full; and Jehovah has brought me back empty. Why do you call me Naomi when God has testified against me and the Almighty has brought evil upon me?”

The third verb tied to *God*, is the Qal perfect of *ʿânâh* (עָנָה) [pronounced *gaw-NAWH*], which means *to answer, to respond*. It is found well over 300 times in the Bible: Gen. 18:27 Ex. 4:1 Deut. 1:14). This word occasionally has a very technical meaning of giving a response in court, as in Deut. 19:18. This is perhaps its rarest usage in Scripture. It can mean *words which stand as a witness against someone* (Deut. 31:21 Ruth 1:21 II Sam. 1:16). It can also mean testimony given in a court of law. Strong’s #6030 BDB #772. The subject of the verb is *God*, and the subject of the next verb is *Shaddai*. The last verb is the Hiphil perfect of *râʿa* (רָעָה) [pronounced *raw-ĠAHĠ*], which means *to be evil, to be bad, displeasing, injurious*. Originally, this word meant *to make a loud noise*

and various roots refers to *crushing or breaking*. In the Hiphil, it means *to make evil, to do evil, to do ill, to cause to do evil, to cause something injurious to be done*. Strong's #7489 BDB #949. We could make a reasonable argument for two members of the Trinity here, but we will not. Suffice to say that God, by bringing evil upon Naomi, has testified against her. Here, it may even appear as though Naomi sees what has happened to her as discipline.

Fuller remarks: *Of the two sexes, the woman is the weaker; of women, old women are feeblest; of old women, widows most woeful; of widows, those that are poor, their plight most pitiful; of poor widows, those who want children, their case most doleful; of widows that want children, those that once had them, and after lost them, their estate most desolate; of widows that have had children, those that are strangers in a foreign country, their condition most comfortless. Yet all these met together in Naomi, as in the center of sorrow, to make the measure of her misery pressed down, shaken together, running over. I conclude, therefore, many men have had affliction—none like Job; many women have had tribulation—none like Naomi.*²¹

Lawson: *Naomi's thoughts of God's dealings with her upon earth are now very different from what they were when these two things came upon her, the loss of children and widowhood. All these things appeared then to be against her. But now she knows and sees that all these things were fruits of the love of God. Amidst your perplexing thoughts about the occurrences of life, it will be profitable to consider what you will think an hundred years hence of these adversities which now spread such a dismal gloom upon your spirits. Blessed are the men who firmly believe that God is wiser than themselves, and who act according to that belief by a patient resignation to God under every trial.*²²

What is occurring is actually quite the opposite. Although God has temporarily emptied Naomi's glass, He will fill it again. It appears as though all God has done is brought evil against Naomi, but, in fact, He is taking care of her and making provision for her.

And so turned back Naomi and Ruth the Moabitess her daughter-in-law with her, the turner back from fields of Moab and they came into Bethlehem at a beginning of a harvest of barley grains.

Ruth
1:22

And so, Naomi and Ruth, the Moabitess, her daughter-in-law with her, the one turning back from the fields of Moab—they entered into Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest.

In summary, Naomi and her Moabite daughter-in-law, Ruth, entered into Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest.

Throughout this book, Ruth is identified as a Moabite. It is almost as though the author is rubbing our noses in it. Although God gave Moab and Ammon specific territory and told the Jews to keep their hands off, this does not mean that the Jews and the Moabites were close. This probably took place during the time that the Moabites were oppressing the Jews, and extorting taxes from them for that privilege; or, this may have taken place immediately afterward. In any case, the Moabites were a despised people.

At the end of this verse, we have the construct of the word *harvest*, followed by the plural feminine noun *sê' ôrâh* (שֵׂעֲרָה) [pronounced *soh-RAW* or *sgo-RAW*], which means *barley*. In the plural, it means *barley grains*. Strong's #8184 BDB #972. The harvesting of grain took place in April and May, barley being harvested first and wheat soon thereafter. There were several steps in the process of the harvest of any grain: (1) the ripe, standing stocks of grain are cut down, usually by men with hand sickles (Deut. 16:9 23:25 Jer. 50:16 Joel 3:13). Often, only the very tops of the grain would be cut off, and the remaining stock left for cattle to graze upon. The harvester's were not to harvest the corners of the field, but to leave that for the poor (Lev. 19:9). (2) The grain is then gathered and bundled into sheaves, which job is generally performed by women (Lev. 21:10). (3) There are generally stocks of grain which are missed in this process. When a person went through a harvested field and

²¹ J. Vernon McGee, *Ruth, the Romance of Redemption*; Thru the Bible Books, ©Pasadena, California, p. 56.

²² Lawson and Carson, *An Exposition of Ruth and Esther*; ©Tyndale Bible Society, Florida; p. 9.

gathered these stocks, this is a process known as *gleaning* (Lev. 19:9 Ruth 2:7). The Israelite farm owners were not allowed to glean their own fields; that was left for the poor to do (Lev. 19:9). (4) The sheaves were then transported by donkey or by cart to the threshing floor (Amos 2:13). (5) The threshing floor itself was generally hard, compact clay soil, with a circle of rocks around it, generally located at the top of a hill. It would be large enough to accommodate an ox or two, perhaps 25–40 ft. in diameter. The Hebrew word behind *thresh* means *to trample upon, to walk upon* (Job 39:15 Dan. 7:23). *Threshing* is the process by which the grain is loosened from the straw or the chaff—the inedible portion of the grain stalks. This can be accomplished by the treading of cattle (Deut. 25:4 Hosea 10:11), by toothed, threshing sledges (Isa. 41:15 Amos 1:3), or by cart wheels (Isa. 28:28). With respect to the oxen—usually a pair of them were drive around by a young boy. Their sharp hooves threshed the grain. We have the statement that these oxen should not be muzzled while threshing, so that they could, periodically, put their heads down and eat a snack (Deut. 25:4). Paul uses this statement in Deuteronomy to show that pastors and evangelists should not be expected to work for free—that they should be compensated for their work (I Cor. 9:7–9 I Tim. 5:18). The poorer person would not have access to this equipment, and they would use a *flail*, which was a long, flexible stick, to beat the grain stalks with; or, even just rocks (Ruth 2:7). The *threshing floors*, where the grain was both threshed and then winnowed, *were hard, smooth, open places, prepared on either rock or clay and carefully chosen for favorable exposure to the prevailing winds. They were usually on the east side—i.e., downwind—of the village.*²³ (6) Then we have a process known as winnowing—the grain is still on the threshing floor (which is at the top of a hill) and it is tossed into the air using winnowing forks (a *rake-sized, five-pronged, wooden fork*), and the wind will pick up and take away the lighter straw and chaff, or the waste. The heavier grain falls to the ground at the winnower’s feet (Jer. 15:7 Psalm 1:4). The wind generally began in the late afternoon and continued till dusk and even past midnight. The person doing the winnowing, would continue to stay out there in the breeze as long as he could. He did not really have to see exactly what he was doing, as the wind did the separating. If the grain and chaff fell through the winnowing fork’s prongs, then a shovel was used to throw it into the air. The chaff was then used to light fires in their domestic stoves and the straw was used to feed their animals. What John the Baptizer said about Jesus should make perfect sense now: **“And His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean His threshing floor; and He will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”** (Matt. 3:12). (7) The grain is then sifted to remove any remaining foreign matter (Amos 9:9). Everything which remained after threshing was placed into a large sieve, and the grain was sifted out. Both the wheat and barley mixed with whatever was on the threshing floor, as well as with darnel grains (which are called *tares* or *weeds* in the New Testament). Darnel grains looked identical to wheat until they ripen. Wheat becomes yellow when it ripens, and darnel grain becomes black (Matt. 13:24–30). The darnel grains are both bitter, and they can cause a person to become dizzy or sick if eaten. This separation between the good and the bad grain is used several times in Scripture (Psalm 1:4 Jer. 15:7 Matt. 13:24–30 Mark 4:26–29). *When Jesus said that Satan wanted to sift Peter like wheat (Luke 22:31), he was probably referring to the physical shaking of the sieve.*²⁴ (8) Once the grain had been threshed and/or sifted, then often a religious feast was held to celebrate the harvest and the completion of the harvest process, and to thank God for the yield. (9) After the harvest, the farmer often camped out with the grain, to insure that it be not stolen (Ruth 3:2–4). According to McGee, they often slept in a circle around the threshing floor, their heads toward the threshing floor, their feet sticking away so that they looked like spokes.²⁵ However, what we often have are whole families involved in the harvest, and there would be places where an entire family would be camped out by the grain as well. In any case, the purpose of everyone sleeping out by the grain after the threshing is that this would make it difficult, if not impossible, for thieves to steal the finished product. (10) Finally, the grain is bagged and then transported or stored (Gen. 42–44). It was generally stored in earthenware receptacles which were named according to their capacity. The grain was poured into the pots or jars until it overflowed (see Luke 6:38). Larger quantities were placed into a dry pit or cistern, into a room attached to a house, into a barn, or even into public storage granaries (Gen. 41:48 Deut. 28:8 Prov. 3:10 Matt. 13:30 Luke 12:18).²⁶ This entire harvesting process was well-known to pretty much anyone in the ancient world, as

²³ *The NIV Study Bible*; ©1995 by The Zondervan Corporation; p. 363.

²⁴ *The New Manners and Customs of Bible Times*; Ralph Gower; ©1987 by Moody International; © by Moody Press; p. 101.

²⁵ J. Vernon McGee, *Ruth*, Thru the Bible Radio, ©1976 in La Verne, California, p. 51.

²⁶ Quoted and paraphrased from *The NIV Study Bible*; ©1995 by The Zondervan Corporation; p. 363 as well as from *The New Manners and Customs of Bible Times*; Ralph Gower; ©1987 by Moody International; © by Moody Press; pp. 95–101. Gower has probably the lengthiest exposition on this process, along with some very informative pictures.

almost everyone took part in some part of it at one time or another, and forms the basis for many parables and illustrations throughout Scripture.

The NIV Study Bible: *Naomi and Ruth arrive in Bethlehem just as the renewed fullness of the land is beginning to be harvested—an early hint that Naomi will be full again.*²⁷

This particular sentence is both a summary of what chapter 1 of the book of Ruth had to say, as well as a transitional verse to take us into the next chapter (which deals with the actual harvest of the barley). You may make a mental note that this is not typical of the Hebrews. Often, a summary verse is given first, with the details added later; and, as we saw near the book of the Judges, two similar accounts of the same battle were placed side-by-side (the second account appeared to have been made by an eyewitness).

Chapter Outline

Charts, Maps and Short Doctrines

Introduction

Text

Addendum

www.kukis.org

Exegetical Studies in Ruth

²⁷ *The NIV Study Bible*; ©1995 by The Zondervan Corporation; p. 363.