

PART III**COMMENTARY****Chapter 1**

NOTE: This story is a literary comparison to the story of Tamar and Judah in Genesis 38. The comparisons along the way will be shown in blue.

The Main Character, the Protagonist, as always since Genesis 1:1 is God. He, since Genesis 3:15 is moving to provide His King, His Son on the throne. The setting finds a family of Judah leaving Bethlehem for another land, Moab, to provide food since this God has restricted food in the Land of Israel due to a curse on the land inferring that there is disobedience during this time of the judges.¹²

- I. **Tension**: Famine: Naomi's family leaves the land of Israel (to the land another god¹³) and returns when food is returned (1:1-22).¹⁴
- A. **Food**:¹⁵ Naomi's family leaves the land of Israel (to the land of another god) and begins to return (1:1-8).¹⁶

¹² It could be a test as well. The words, "there was a famine in the land" occur only in Genesis 12 and 26 which were not for judgment but for a test to both Abram and Isaac.

¹³ Note the connection between the provision of food and the land as related to YHWH is made in 1:6. Thus the text makes it clear that to escape the land of Israel was to attempt to escape the curse that YHWH had put on the land.

¹⁴ Chapter one is marked off by a cycle. Naomi (actually her family) and their geographical move to Bethlehem occur at the beginning of the chapter, and the move back to Bethlehem at the end. This is very similar to Abram's testing in Genesis 12 where he left the land due to the famine and then came back after frustrating himself with the journey to Egypt. The basis of this beginning move was to escape famine, and the return was also for food. While it may appear to be strictly a geographical move (no theological implications), it had great covenant implications. The *return* to the land physically was to be accompanied by a *return* spiritually (cf. Deut. 30:1-2) from their disobedience that caused the exile. But in *returning*, Naomi is unaware of her spiritual failure and the requirement for repentance since she later uses the same word "return" to send here daughters-in-law back to disobedient blessing under another god, the exact failure that she had done when she left the land. It becomes clear her motivation was to fulfill her hunger, ignorant of her failure and God's desire for repentance. Leaving the land, according to covenant (Deut. 28:36, 37, 64, 65; 30:1-2) was actually a judgment of God for disobedience. Here Elimilech does it willingly.

¹⁵ It should be noted here that food is related ultimately to seed here in this book based on the literary parallel to Gen. 12:10. (compare Gen. 12:10: לָגוֹר שָׁם וַיֵּרֶד אַבְרָם מִצְרָיִםָה ... וַיְהִי רָעַב בְּאֶרֶץ to Ruth 1:1: וַיְהִי רָעַב בְּאֶרֶץ ... אִישׁ מִבֵּית לָחֶם יְהוּדָה לָגוֹר וַיֵּלֶךְ). Abram

1. **Tension:** Israel is cursed with famine (due to disobedience to YHWH). (1:1a).¹⁷

1:1 Now it came about in the days when the judges governed,¹⁸ that there was a famine¹⁹ in the land.

2. **Response:** **Elimilech** exiles himself to a foreign land (of a foreign god) to evade the famine and remains there (1:1b-2).²⁰

had moved to Egypt based on his own ability to preserve himself and the promise, and thus his own attempts at preserving the seed. Elimilech parallels the same desire). Note that the phrase **וַיְהִי רָעָב בְּאֶרֶץ** occurs only in Genesis 12:10, 26:1 and Ruth 1:1. Genesis 26:1 is also a literary parallel of Abram's error of 12:10. Note that famine may not be an indicator of prior disobedience, but may be placed on the scene for the point of testing obedience (cf. Job). The blessing/cursing might precede the faith as well as follow it. Refer to Deut. 8:2: "And you shall remember all the way which the LORD your God has led you in the wilderness these forty years, that He might humble you, testing you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not."

¹⁶ The first segment of this chapter is marked out by a decision to go to Moab based on famine and the decision to return. The following outline points are 'action-response' repetitions. When Elimilech and his sons act outside of the covenant obligations, the response is a covenant curse. Yet Naomi places no significance on this. The rapid interchange in the narrative here is the author's way of showing direct cause and effect. Note also that each is dying for their own decision. Elimilech moves the family to Moab and dies. The sons marry Moabite women and die.

¹⁷ That famine was a covenant response to disobedience is seen clearly in Leviticus 26:14, 19, 26; Deut. 28:15, 23-24. The fact that this was in the time of the Judges (Lit. "The judges judged") indicates a time of covenant disobedience through ignorance. As previously mentioned the author makes it clear in 1:6 that the famine was caused by YHWH.

¹⁸ Literally, the phrase is "The judges judged". This is indicative of the time related in the Book of Judges, that every man did that which was right in his own eyes. It was a time of apostasy, where men did not know the covenant, yet still ignorantly aligned themselves with the name of YHWH.

¹⁹ The famine here indicated YHWH's judgment for disobedience. This is recorded in Deut. 28:23-24, Lev. 26:19, 26. While the famine's source is not mentioned directly here, it is alluded to in an opposite manner in 1:6 "the LORD had visited His people in giving them food."

²⁰ Elimilech's response should have been repentance (*return*) since famine indicated disobedience (Lev. 26:40-42, and Deut. 30:1-3, and Ruth 1:6). Elimilech's self-desired exile was the reverse of a "return".

Elimilech, like Judah, is covenant disobedient, seeking to establish his prosperity through human means. Judah marries a Canaanite woman and provides a (likely Canaanite) woman for his son, Er, so as to provide Seed.

And a certain man of Bethlehem in Judah went²¹ to sojourn²² in the land²³ of Moab²⁴ with his wife and his two sons. 2 And the name of the man was Elimelech, and the name of his wife, Naomi; and the names of his two sons were Mahlon²⁵ and Chilion, Ephrathites of Bethlehem²⁶ in Judah²⁷. Now they entered the land of Moab and remained²⁸ there.²⁹

²¹ The word here is “walk” (הלך) which is *very* frequently used for “walking” with God (Gen. 2:14) as in the case of Adam or Enoch, meaning they were living according to the revelation of God. Of course, the term is used generally as ‘to go’, etc. However, one cannot, in this context avoid the seeming contradiction of Elimilech’s movement as he “walks” away from Israel, when Deut. 28:36 talks about God ‘walking you away from Israel’ as a judgment. "The LORD will bring you (יוליך, Hiphil Imperfect) and your king, whom you shall set over you, to a nation which neither you nor your fathers have known, and there you shall serve other gods, wood and stone.

Abram, in Genesis 12 which is a strong comparison to this verse in Ruth, was instructed to “Go forth” (“walk,” הלך, 12:1) and Abram “went forth (“walked,” הלך) as the Lord had instructed him and Lot went (“walked,” הלך) with him” (12:4)

²² The word here indicates ‘to live as a stranger’, cf. BDB.

²³ This is the word for “field” not *eretz* as used for Israel in the previous sentence.

²⁴ Refer to Deut. 23:3 to point out that the Moabites were not equal with Jews in their dealings with YHWH and were not to enter the assembly. In Deut. 23:6, God points out that Israel was never to seek their peace or their prosperity all their days. This may appear that Israel was not to ask them for help (as they did in the days of Balaam), i.e., peace and prosperity, but may be that they should not seek their welfare when YHWH was wanting to continue a judgment. The former seems more likely in this case and would apply here as Naomi had wrongly sought out the prosperity (i.e., help) of Moab.

²⁵ These names mean “sick” and “pining” and are used in the covenant. Cf. Article: Naomi in the Book of Ruth, A Literary and Covenant Analysis, *Bibliotheca Sacra*)

²⁶ The name ‘Beth-lehem’ means ‘House of Bread’. Contrast when God turns the “bread” back on in the City of Bread. The word literally here is “bread” (לחם), which is in an ironical contrast to Beth-lehem (בית-לחם).

²⁷ This story will literarily play back to the story of Judah and Tamar. Whether the name Judah had to be added here for geographical identification is a question. However, the fact that

3. **Tension**: Elimilech dies (Naomi left with sons only, 1:3).³⁰

3 Then Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died,³¹ and she was left with her two sons.

4. **Response**: Sons marry foreign women (and stay in land of foreign god for 10 years³²), 1:4).³³

4:12 insures that the reader recalls the story of Judah and Tamar tends to lend significance to it's mention here. This story has everything to do with the forefathers in allusion, Judah and Tamar, Abraham, Lot and his daughters (Moab), liaisons in the night (Lot, Jacob and Leah). Tamar's story was also regarding the value of the seed and she valued it, taking advantage of Judah's weakness by making herself look appealing (notice Naomi wants Ruth to be appealing in 3:1). Lot's daughters took advantage of Lot to obtain seed in the middle of the night after considerable drinking.

²⁸ This literally is "were."

²⁹ This demonstrates the movement into Moab was not just a visit (10 years, see 1:4). They made this their home. It was a violation of covenant. They actually were doing what God would have done when he cursed Israel, sent them out of the land. Here they go willingly not recognizing this was in fact a curse of God. Normally it would be enemies who would drag them out.

³⁰ Life and death were covenant blessings and cursings for obedience and disobedience. Refer to Lev. 26, Deut. 28--30.

³¹ This is also a curse of God. There does not seem to be a source noted, but when coupled with all the other things and Deut. 4:25 which implies that being old and seeing one's children's children would be a blessing.

³² Note here the increasing commitment of time that Naomi made to stay in Moab. This was not a visit.

³³ Those under covenant were not to marry those not under covenant (Deut. 7:1-3). While Deut. 7 does not mention Moabites specifically, Moabites are obviously unclean with regard to covenant (Lev. 20:2-5, Num. 22--25, Num. 31, Deut. 23:3, 6). Note that Solomon is denounced (1 Kings 11:1-7) and the Israelites (Neh. 13:23-29) for marrying Moabite women and the text of 1 Kings refers to Deuteronomy 7 making it a proper interpretation that Moabites were part of the restriction. It should be noted that the Covenant does not detail all the possible items that would break the Law. The intent of Deuteronomy 7:3 was clearly to exclude from marriage those of other nations. These nations were within the land particularly and that was because of the nature of the inheritance of the land. However, the denoting that these marriages would end up taking their sons and daughters to the worship of other gods is the clear intent. And that would include those who worshipped the gods of other nations.

4 And they took for themselves Moabite women *as* wives,³⁴ the name of the one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth. And they lived there about ten years.³⁵

As Judah had (likely) given his eldest son to a Canaanite woman (Tamar), so also Naomi's (Elimilech's) sons marry Moabites.

5. **Tension:** Sons die - Naomi left with daughters-in-law only (1:5).³⁶

5 Then both Mahlon and Chilion also died³⁷; and the woman was bereft³⁸ of her two children and her husband.

God killed the two eldest sons of Judah for disobedience with regard to the Seed and here he kills the two sons of Naomi (Elimilech) for disobedience in marrying Moabites.

6. **Response:** Naomi returns to land to enjoy blessing of YHWH³⁹ due to Israel's repentance (1:6).⁴⁰

³⁴ Though Deut. 7:1-3 does not mention Moabites, they were included as prohibited from entry into the assembly of the Lord in 23:3. Their love of foreign gods was historical according to Numbers 22ff. when they prohibited Israel from passing through their land. They are clearly condemned along with the others in 1 Kings 11:1-7 when Solomon married foreign wives. Neh. 13:23-29 also refers to this as sin. Leviticus 20:2 refers to the penalty of death for giving your offspring to Molech (Naomi urges her daughters later to go back to their gods).

³⁵ A repeat of verse 2 shows that they are relating well to the land of the foreign god.

³⁶ Refer to footnote for 1:3.

³⁷ Mahlon and Chilion's death is again the curse (it might seem unrelated) of God. The repetitive action - reaction of the text identifies this as being prompted by their refusal to return (repent) to the land, but even more their marriage to Moabites.

Also note a similarity to Judah's son's deaths in Genesis 38 leaving the similarity of the chance of impossibility of seed for Tamar.

³⁸ Literally, it is "had left" or "remained" This seems to be a covenant implication that she was cursed. The word is used in Lev. 26 and Deut. 28 for what is left over after a curse.

³⁹ YHWH is clearly the provider of fruitfulness (1:6). Later YHWH will take responsibility for the fruit of the womb (4:13).

⁴⁰ Naomi finally makes a response (though only physical) that is within covenant expectations. She *returns* (Hebrew: שׁוּב). The multiple use of this word in the first chapter is

6 Then she arose with her daughters-in-law that she might **return**⁴¹ from the land⁴² of Moab, for she had heard in the land of Moab that the LORD had visited⁴³ His people in giving them food.⁴⁴

- B. **Children:** Naomi attempts to return her daughters-in-law to the land of their own god to insure seed (1:7-19a).⁴⁵

important in view of its covenant meaning of ‘return to YHWH’ and ‘YHWH will return to you’, and ‘return you to blessing’ (cf. Deut. 30:2, also 4:30). The use of the word occurs in Ruth 1:6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 15, 16, 21, 22, 2:6, 4:3, 4:15, to demonstrate Naomi’s ignorance of the requirement of the spiritual *return* of the covenant. The word “return” is an injunction of Deut. 30:1-9 for those out of the land due to being cursed. The point was that when they found themselves in that state they were to repent (return) to YHWH. While Naomi misuses that word, and Ruth uses it in a correct manner, the interesting thing is that they are at the very site where Moses gave that renewal of covenant in Deut. 29 on the plains of Moab prior to entry into the land. (See the Appendix for a study of the use of this word in Ruth.)

⁴¹ Here are the first usages of the word “return” or Hebrew *shub*. She was to “repent” but she only physically returned. The word occurs again in the following verses: Ruth 1:6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 15, 16, 21, 22, 2:6, 4:3, 4:15

⁴² This word is different than that used in 1:2 which was more of an agricultural ‘field’. This word means ‘land’ or ‘field’ and is still different than the term used for ‘land’ of Israel (*eretz*).

⁴³ Naomi does not recognize that the cure for famine was repentance. Note here that the provider of food is YHWH, thus enforcing the fact that the curse on the land was caused by YHWH. Apparently the nation had repented without her. This will be the case in chapter 2 as Boaz is seen enjoying the blessings of YHWH with his servants.

Deuteronomy 5:9 refers to God visiting iniquity on the fathers for worshiping other gods. “You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, and on the third and the fourth *generations* of those who hate Me”

⁴⁴ The word literally here is “bread” (לחם), which is in an ironical contrast to Bethlehem (בית-לחם).

⁴⁵ The dialogue between Naomi and her daughters-in-law marks out this section. The contrast is between Naomi and Ruth, with Orpah demonstrating a contrast with Ruth. Here Naomi uses the word ‘return’ multiple times to indicate that Ruth and Naomi should return back to their people, country and gods. She does not act properly in view of the fact that this is a covenant word used for an obedient return to YHWH. Thus, Naomi turns these gentile women away from YHWH using YHWH’s very word which requests that all men come to Him. It is

1. **Scene:** Returning to the land of YHWH's blessing (1:7).

7 So she departed from the place where she was,⁴⁶ and her two daughters-in-law with her; and they went on the way to **return** to the land of Judah.

2. **Naomi Action:** Naomi attempts to have daughters blessed with children through their own people⁴⁷, pagan Moabites (1:8-9).⁴⁸

Like Judah sent Tamar back to her father's house, so also Naomi attempts to send her daughters to their own house. Judah's motive is that to send a third son into Tamar is to expect that he will die as well, and so he holds Shelah for another woman in violation of Genesis 2:24. Naomi appears here to feel she has no hope of seed through these two widowed Moabites (as Judah did with Tamar), so the motivation is similar in the sense that Genesis 2:24 was not considered operational for fulfilling of their hopes.

particularly important here since the very function of Israel in the Abrahamic covenant was to bring nations to YHWH through Israel (Gen. 12:1-3).

⁴⁶ There is an interesting avoidance of the mention of Moab here. It appears that the author is referring to more than a land here, but is again implying that she was in the land of Moab in a permanent fashion.

⁴⁷ Her point is that they had treated the Israelites well even though they were aliens; the marriage bond had united them. But that is clearly over now in Naomi's mind. Now they are aliens from one another.

⁴⁸ Note the conflict here in Naomi's blessing. While she asks for YHWH's blessing for these women she sends them back to their gods. This first imperative is meant for them to return to their roots for their increased odds of finding a husband apart from Naomi. In other words, Naomi is arguing based on simple national, family ties. They will fare better if the tie to Naomi and Israel is broken and they return to their former alignment. This is a physical argument that will continue. The relationship through their husbands to Naomi is considered of less value than that of the former physical relationship to their own family (in violation of Genesis 2:24). There is evidence here for a literary link to Genesis 2:24 where a man leaves the physical link to father and mother to form a stronger bond to the husband (Mahlon and Chilion). Refer to the note on 1:14 where the word "cleave" is used from Genesis 2:24. The word is used in 2:8, 21, 23 when Ruth is to "cling" to the maids or the servants. In Genesis 2:24 the marriage had bonded her into Naomi's family, and thus was a violation to return to her mother. This is paralleled in Judah's selfish statement when he sends Tamar back to her father's house.

8 And Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go, **return** each of you to her mother's⁴⁹ house. May the LORD deal kindly⁵⁰ with you as you have dealt with the dead⁵¹ and with me 9 "May the LORD grant that you may find rest,⁵² each in the house of her husband."⁵³ Then she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept.

3. **Response:** Orpah and Ruth refuse to return to pagan families (1:10).

10 And they said to her, "*No*, but we will surely **return** with you to your people."⁵⁴

4. **Naomi Action:** Naomi again attempts to have daughters receive YHWH's blessing apart from her house and Israel, feeling she is cursed of God (1:11-13).⁵⁵

⁴⁹ This is a clear contrast to returning to Naomi's house. She is being exhorted to return to her blood relative mother, not to go with Naomi based on marriage, and thus she is still an alien in Naomi's eyes. However the most important thing here is that this is a violation of Gen. 2:24, where now through marriage Ruth was locked into Naomi's family and inheritance. This is a parallel to Judah's exhortation to Tamar, a similar activity, from which the Book of Ruth is constantly compared.

⁵⁰ Here is the use of the Hebrew "*hesed*" or "one-way sacrificial love of YHWH". Naomi is wishing this on them, but is in fact not faithful to them as she sends them to the land of another god. *Hesed* was the character of YHWH. It could not be used of another god with pagans.

⁵¹ This is a reference to their treatment of Mahlon and Chilion, who were their husbands, since Elimilech was dead by the time of the marriage.

⁵² This is the word for "ease".

⁵³ What Naomi is proposing here is that they remarry Moabites and find comfort in that union. Thus she is clearly not attempting to please herself here, but is indeed worried about her daughters-in-law prosperity. (Although it is a possibility that she might have considered these Moabite aliens as a burden to her in Israel as they would have no value in her eyes.)

⁵⁴ There is a discussion here going on as to whether the daughters will find blessing better in Israel or in Moab. Naomi's premise is that they will find it better in Moab without her, while theirs is that of loyalty to Naomi and the family they now have. Naomi feels that God has cursed her family and that they cannot find anything but disaster in Israel through her. She is ignorant of the fact that she is cursed for her own cause and that repentance will reverse it.

⁵⁵ Naomi's second overture interacts with the Levirate marriage (apparently well aware of its rules and consequences). According to the Levirate instruction for Israel, a brother was to marry the widow and bring up children to the dead husband. Naomi's response is that she has no

11 But Naomi said, "**Return**, my daughters. Why should you go with me? Have I yet sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands? 12 "**Return**, my daughters! Go, for I am too old to have a husband. If I said I have hope, if I should even have a husband tonight⁵⁶ and also bear sons, 13 would you therefore wait until they were grown?⁵⁷ Would you therefore refrain from marrying? No, my daughters; for it is harder for me than for you, for the hand of the LORD has gone forth against me."⁵⁸

5. **Response:** Orpah returns but Ruth refuses to return to family (1:14).⁵⁹

more children in her womb, thus no brothers were available. In addition the Covenant restricted marriage outside of the family (since the seed would then be a non-family member and the brother's seed would come to naught). Thus, she sees no way of children for her daughters. YHWH appears to have placed her in a 'no win' situation. Her assessment that she is cursed is accurate. However, the covenant provided relief from the curse, but through 'return' (repentance).

⁵⁶ If Naomi is familiar with the Levirate marriage, and it appears that she is, her suggestion that she could marry that night might also suggest that there is a proper Levir for her in her view, i.e., a brother of Elimilech. Since she denies the possibilities of Levirate marriage for her daughters seemingly on the basis that there is no "brother" as provided in the Covenant, then by contrast the possibility of her marriage seems to imply that there is a potential Levir, and thus a brother of Elimilech. If the marriage is being proposed for Naomi, the Elimilech's brother would qualify. Thus it would appear that Boaz would be a brother, as would the 'nearer kinsman' of chapter 4. The reason that the nearer kinsman would be nearer would be that he was older than Boaz. Therefore it appears that Ruth is standing in for Naomi since Naomi is too old, and thus bringing up a son to Naomi and herself in the bargain. If an uncle were a legitimate levir then this would be fine. In Naomi's case her husband was dead and thus the brother would be the levir. However, if the husband was alive, and there were no sons left, who would be the levir, if anyone? In the case of Judah, he became the Levir, and it is a possibility that he was a legitimate levir had Shelah not been available. In any case, Judah's seed is determined as legitimate.

⁵⁷ This is an allusion to Shelah in Genesis 38 where Rahab is told to wait until he grows up.

⁵⁸ Here Naomi feels that the Lord is against her without cause (superstition).

⁵⁹ The use of the word "clung" here is significant in covenant terms. It is used in Genesis 2:24 to speak of the marriage connection between husband and wife being stronger than the natural tie to father and mother. This appears to be the context here as Ruth refuses her natural tie to her mother, to that of marriage and her connection to Naomi. Interestingly, the word is used in Deuteronomy to signify an instruction to "cling" to YHWH (10:20) else the covenantal curses will "cling" to them (28:21). Thus Ruth here recognizes her vow to her husband (now dead) to be continuing in the link to her mother-in-law, and then retakes the vow, updated to bond herself to this old, childless, hopeless widow.

14 And they lifted up their voices and wept again; and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung⁶⁰ to her.

Like Tamar, Ruth refuses to give up the hope of The Seed. While Tamar actually had returned to her family in obedience to Judah, she had never given up hope of returning back to Judah's family and Shelah.

6. **Naomi Action:** Naomi attempts to turn Ruth to join Orpah based on Orpah's response to return to pagan family (1:15).⁶¹

15 Then she said, "Behold, your sister-in-law has **gone back** to her people and her gods;⁶² **return** after your sister-in-law."⁶³

7. **Response:** Ruth refuses to return to family taking oath by YHWH to bond herself to Naomi, her people and God⁶⁴ (1:16-17).⁶⁵

⁶⁰ This is the same word used in Gen. 2:24 when speaking of a man's 'cleaving' unto his wife. Naomi is rejecting a covenant with a husband in her own land to covenant with Naomi. Ruth has chosen what cannot be seen (a widowed mother with no hope of helping her) instead of what seems to be more sure (a husband in her own land.)

⁶¹ Naomi's last overture is a choice between Ruth's Moabite sister-in-law and her Israelite mother-in-law. The question was; where would Ruth place her future? Ruth chose Israel and blessing under the Israelite God, YHWH. Naomi felt physical blessing was more likely due to genealogical ties. *Ruth rejects a bond with a young Moabite man with great hope of seed for a bond to a childless, foreign, cursed widow (and her God YHWH).*

⁶² Here is probably the bottom of the barrel of Naomi's suggestion. She has equated blessing with the Moabite god instead of YHWH. She has equated their god as being as effective as the Israelite god. Refer to Leviticus 20:2, 1 Kings 11:1-7 and Nehemiah 13 for the rejection of Molech, god of the Moabites.

⁶³ Here Naomi argues, as she always does, not from covenant reasoning, but from physical reasoning. The fact that Orpah has made a decision is Naomi's reasoning that it is a cause to impel Ruth to make the same decision (seemingly going with the crowd).

⁶⁴ Recall former and latter oaths to YHWH. God responded to Hannah's vow and she kept it (1 Sam.1--2). Jephthah (Judges 11) made an unnecessary pagan-like vow. Saul later made a similar vow (1 Sam. 14:24). The men of Israel made a vow (Judges 21) to keep their people from marrying Benjamites and later had to find an illegitimate loophole to preserve the tribe.

⁶⁵ Ruth's final response was to bond herself to YHWH, Israel and Naomi through an oath. Oaths were very serious, especially when taken in YHWH's name and could not be invalidated (Deut. 23:21-23). It is very interesting that Ruth uses YHWH's name in response to Naomi's mention of the Moabite gods. (Note she did not vow by Chemosh).

16 But Ruth said, "Do not urge me to leave you *or turn back* from following you; for where you go, I will go, and where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people *shall be* my people⁶⁶, and your God, my God.⁶⁷ 17 "Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. Thus may the LORD do to me, and worse, if *anything but* death parts you and me."

Tamar was legally connected to the seed by Genesis 2:24 and Ruth recognizes the same legal connection, reciting Genesis 2:24 to Naomi to reconfirm her marriage vows to Mahlon, and thus her connection to Naomi's.

8. **Naomi Action:** Naomi takes no action based on Ruth's persistence since she has taken a vow to YHWH (1:18).⁶⁸

18 When she saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more to her.⁶⁹

9. **Conclusion:** Ruth and Naomi return to Bethlehem (1:19a).

19 So they both went until they came to Bethlehem.

- C. **Status:** Naomi summarizes her return to Bethlehem to demonstrate her lack of spiritual return (1:19b-22).⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Recall that under the Abrahamic Covenant to bless Israel was to bless God. This is what she was doing, blessing Israel and her God.

⁶⁷ Here Ruth uses the general name for "God," *Elohim*. However in contrast to Naomi, Ruth has chosen the Israelite God, as she has chosen YHWH. She will use the personal name in verse 17.

⁶⁸ Naomi's response is not based on covenant but Ruth's persistence. In other words, Naomi was not converted by Ruth's commitment to YHWH (Ruth's obligation regarded YHWH first without regard to resultant blessing, while Naomi evaluated YHWH only in terms of blessing without regard to obedience.)

⁶⁹ It is Ruth's oath that finally persuades Naomi to give up. Naomi had urged Ruth to return to Moab to escape the curse that encompassed all who related to her. However, to urge Ruth to forsake a vow would force her to incur the very curse she had hoped that Ruth would escape. Thus, she gives up.

⁷⁰ This closing scene of chapter one gives an insight into Naomi's relationship with YHWH by revealing the interaction with the women of Bethlehem. Naomi's understanding of God is not unlike the pagan's, superstitious. Had she known the covenant she would have examined herself and realized she was unfaithful, not God.

1. **Scene:** Naomi returns to land (1:19b).

And it came about when they had come to Bethlehem, that all the city was stirred because of them,

2. **Inquiry:** Women inquire regarding Naomi's return (1:19c).

and the women said⁷¹, "Is this Naomi?"

3. **Response:** God has (unjustly) dealt with her (like pagan gods without cause) (1:20-21).

20 And she said to them, "Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara⁷², for the Almighty⁷³ has dealt very bitterly with me. 21 "I went out full,⁷⁴ but the LORD has **brought** me **back**⁷⁵ empty.⁷⁶ Why do you

⁷¹ The women are introduced here to receive the reaction of Naomi's evaluation of her name.

⁷² She will request that they change her name to "bitter", but they will ultimately, by the end of the book, call her once again, Naomi or "pleasant".

⁷³ The comments of Naomi ring of Job, since Naomi refers to *Shaddai* here twice. In two verses Naomi uses this Name equal to or more than any book of the Bible except Genesis (6 times) and Job (31 times). Of course, Job's question is questioning that God's Almighty power should be applied to a weak man.

Ruth 1:20 the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me.

כִּי־הָמַר שָׂרִי לִי מָאֵר:

Job 27:2 the Almighty, who has embittered my soul,

וְשָׂרִי הָמַר נַפְשִׁי:

⁷⁴ Naomi's evaluation is obviously stilted. She did have two children when she left Bethlehem, but she was not in a covenant relationship. She still was not when she returned to Bethlehem. Even by the end of the book the reader has no indication that Naomi has changed. As is typical of the Book of Judges God has acted simply on a physical response with very little in the way of acknowledgment of Him. This is the opposite of the covenant. When Israel would be exiled, they would go out empty (as Naomi did, even though she had children) and come back full (as Naomi did, since her means of blessing now stood beside her). Yet, Naomi

call me Naomi, since the LORD has witnessed⁷⁷ against me and the Almighty⁷⁸ has afflicted me?"⁷⁹

ignores Ruth, seeing in her a hopeless widowed alien, now without any husband or country. Ruth, on the other hand, sees the same situation in Naomi, but considers her as the receiver of her love.

⁷⁵ Here the reference is again to the Hebrew “*shub*”.

⁷⁶ These are not kind words. Compare to Eliphaz’ criticisms of Job in Job 22:9 “You have sent widows away empty”. In addition, and more significantly, Boaz uses this word in 3:17 to make sure Ruth returns to Naomi with something so that Naomi would not be ‘empty’.

⁷⁷ The word here is עָנָה “to afflict” or “to put down”. “Witnessed” appears to be a kind translation. Deut. 8:23 uses it to bring Israel to repentance.

⁷⁸ Psalm 91:1 here is instructive. Naomi has criticized *Shaddai*. The Psalmist speaks of Him as a Protector. In verse 4, Boaz will quote this to Ruth regarding her protection by YHWH.

1 He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High

Will abide in the shadow of **THE ALMIGHTY.**

2 I will say to the LORD, "My refuge

and my fortress,

My God, in whom I trust!"

3 For it is He who delivers you from the snare of the trapper,

And from the deadly pestilence.

4 He will cover you with His pinions,

And **UNDER HIS WINGS YOU MAY SEEK REFUGE;**

His faithfulness is a shield and bulwark.

⁷⁹ The base word here is for “evil” indicating literally that YHWH has “done evil to me.” It could mean harm, or could imply that God has acted without a cause. “To do an injury or hurt” would be the literal translation. However, Jonah states the same thing, that God had done an evil to him, literally, “And it was evil to Jonah evil greatly and it burned to him” (4:1)

וַיֵּרַע אֶל־יְהוָה רָעָה גְדוֹלָה וַיִּחַר לוֹ: (Jonah 4:1)

4. **Summary:** Naomi returns to land, but has not returned⁸⁰ spiritually⁸¹ (1:22).

22 So Naomi returned, and with her Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter-in-law, who returned from the land of Moab. And they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest.

⁸⁰ Note here that the word ‘returned’ (Heb.: שׁוּב) is applied to Ruth, who was not coming home, as Naomi. The servant of Boaz repeats this in 2:6.

⁸¹ Note here that Naomi is in the same spiritual attitude toward God that was the case in 1:1.