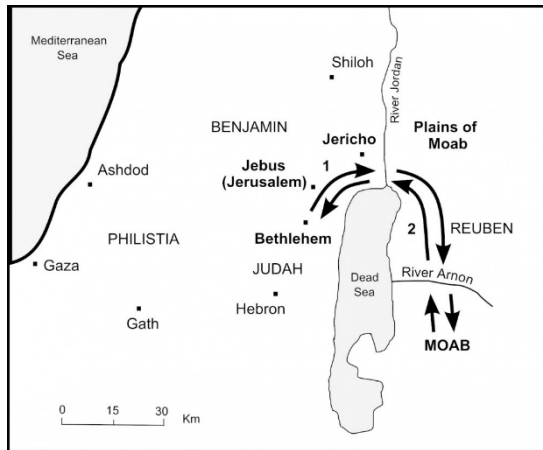


Ruth Chapter 1



SETTING (Time & Place): *In the days when the judges ruled* (1:1), ie. C.1050 BCE. Bethlehem & Moab

WRITER: Probably written around 600 BCE, but writer is unnamed.

BACKGROUND: Women's Issues: Many issues concerning the status of women surface in this book. It centres on the women who are its main characters, and focusses on relationships, and how women experience death, marriage, singleness, childlessness and birth. Women's powerlessness

and vulnerability, as foreigner and outsider are also poignant issues, balanced against the possible progressive outcomes when they assess resources, plan and act with care.

The Book of Ruth addresses issues of stereotype as it questions identity, culture and community for both men and women.

CHAPTER 1 OUTLINE:

I. Prologue: The departure (1-7)

II. The turning point on the road to back to Bethlehem (8-18)

III. The return to Bethlehem (19-22)

I. PROLOGUE:

ECHOES OF GENESIS: LEAVING HOME BECAUSE OF A FAMINE:

- * Abram and Sarai in Egypt (Gen 12:10)

Now there was a famine in the land. So Abram went down to Egypt to reside there as an alien, for the famine was severe in the land.

- * Isaac and Rebekah (Gen 26:1)

Now there was a famine in the land, besides the former famine that had occurred in the days of Abraham. And Isaac went to Gerar, to King Abimelech of the Philistines.

- * Jacob and sons (Gen 41-47)

¹Now the famine was severe in the land. ²And when they had eaten up the grain that they had brought from Egypt, their father said to them, 'Go again, buy us a little more food.' (Gen 43:1-2)

II. THE TURNING POINT ON THE JOURNEY BACK TO BETHLEHEM (1:8-18)

A crossroads in all of their lives, Naomi is returning to Bethlehem, Orpah is returning to Moab, and Ruth refuses and vows to remain with Naomi, wherever and whatever.

Childless widows were expected to return to their fathers' homes. Eg. *Then Judah said to his daughter-in-law Tamar, 'Remain a widow in your father's house until my son Shelah grows up'* (Gen 38:11)

The book returns to the story of Judah and Tamar, with their son Perez towards the end (4:12).

III. RETURN TO BETHLEHEM (1:19-22)

The focus is on how the women express their thoughts and feelings at this point in the narrative – Naomi's bitterness and sense of loss and defeat, Ruth's silence suggesting a more open mind.

QUESTIONS

1. Is there a problem for Naomi, returning with a Moabite daughter-in-law or is she being selfless and generous in planning to return alone to Bethlehem?
2. Why is there so much discussion about family connections and Naomi releasing the Moabite wives of her deceased sons, and praying that the LORD would give them husbands?
3. Why does Naomi feel so much more bitter about her condition than that of her daughter-in-law? How is 'the hand of the LORD' at work here?
4. How does Ruth's use of the words 'turning back' have a different meaning from either Naomi's or Orpah's?
5. What is significant about Ruth's vow of 'Wherever you go, I will go' and what are its implications?
6. How do you interpret Naomi's silence (v18) – appropriate, reluctantly accepting she can't change Ruth's mind, accepting Ruth has made a firm decision, gratitude, resentment, ambivalence, something else?
7. Why do you think we don't hear any comments about the journey Naomi and Ruth made returning from Moab to Bethlehem, about fifty miles?
8. Explain some of the reasons why 'the whole city' was excited when Naomi and Ruth arrive in Bethlehem?
9. Famine has been replaced by harvest, and it is probably early spring. Are there any echoes of implications in that timing for Ruth and Naomi?
10. How do you see the hand of God guiding Ruth's decisions?