



Ruth 1:19-22

SO, NAOMI RETURNED...

19 So the two women went on until they came to Bethlehem. When they arrived in Bethlehem, the whole town buzzed with excitement over them. The women said, “Can this be Naomi?”

The whole town was stirred, but only the women speak to Naomi: They may be surprised at the sudden reappearance of the woman after more than 10 years. This may also mean that her appearance had drastically changed since they saw her last.

The sight of defeat

The sight of reversal

The sight of cumulative loss

The sight of bitterness

I wear the mask



20 Do not call me Naomi, she replied. Call me Mara, for Shaddai has made my lot very bitter

No 'am (pleasant) or *Na 'im* (sweet)

Call me *ma ra* (bitter)

Shaddai (47 times in Scripture. The Almighty. Often paired with *El*. In the context of Ruth, it conveys the same meaning as in *Job 5:17*.)

Parallelism: Sweet is to Full as Bitter is to Empty. It also works as opposites, Sweet is the opposite of Bitter, as Full is opposite to Empty. Naomi could call herself Sweet when she was Full (husband, children, land.) But now that she is Empty (no husband, no children, no land) the word Bitter most accurately represents who she is.

This polarity between Full and Empty will be seen again in 3:17

Why is Sweet now Bitter?

Contrast verses 13 and 20

In both cases Naomi's bitterness is connected with her assumption that the Lord's hand has been turned against her.

The expression "has made my lot very bitter" can also be translated, "dealt harshly with me" (NRSV) or "has afflicted me" (NIV). The word can also mean "to testify (against)," "to afflict," "to be concerned with (negatively... turned his attention to me.) The Hebrew Bible (Masoretic) chose "testified against me" (as in 1 Sam 12:3, 2 Sam 1:16.)

Naomi feels that she has done something wrong, and God is punishing her

21 I went away full, and the Lord has brought me back empty.
How can you call me Naomi, when the Lord has dealt harshly
with me, when Shaddai has brought misfortune upon me!”

“What is in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet.” (Romeo and Juliet.)

In Biblical literature the first name describes an original purpose, status, or identifier, whereas the new name signifies a new mission, a new purpose, a new identity.

Abram becomes Abraham (Father of Nations) and Sarai becomes Sarah (Mother of Nations.)

Jacob becomes Israel (Genesis 35: 11 “A nation I will form out of thee, kings shall come out of thy loins.”

Simon becomes Peter (rock) which defines his new role: A rock upon which Christ will build his Church.

Confirmation, Monastic Life, even Marriage

Naomi sees bitterness as her new identity and her destiny. Perhaps there is a small degree of altruism in this self-giving name. May others see the bitter one and be reminded of the righteous judgement against the apostate.

El Shaddai



22a Thus
Naomi returned
from the
country of
Moab; she
returned with
her daughter-in-
law Ruth the
Moabite.

The verse looks both backward and forward. As such, it is the perfect ending for the chapter.

The LOOK BACK:

- Naomi returned from Moab: This is a summary statement that assumes she had once left Bethlehem, settled in Moab, stayed there for a while... and is now returning.
- She brought her daughter in Law with her: This also is a summary statement because it implies that Naomi's sons found wives, but it also has echoes of tragedy because it does not mention the other daughter-in-law and it assumes the death of the husband and two sons
- Ruth is a Moabite: This a summary statement that heightens the betrayal of El Shaddai, the turning away from the patrimony, the disobedience of Deuteronomy 25, etc. This statement explains Naomi's current condition.

22b They arrived in Bethlehem at the beginning of the Barley festival.

The LOOK FORWARD:

- They arrived at the beginning of the Barley Festival
- Passover is near
- This is festival time, which implies forgiveness by El Shaddai: The skies have opened, the Lord has blessed his people with food, the Land has given the people the way to survive another season.
- Harvest time brings hope to the dispossessed. This is a propitious time to glean, to find a job, or to beg. Perhaps God will provide a Kinsman Redeemer to buy the lost land. Perhaps God will repay Ruth for the kindness she has shown her husband and her mother-in-law.
- The mention of the festival is important because of the association of Passover with conversion, and Ruth has now pledged to worship the God of Israel. Will God bless the foreigners who choose him about all the pagan gods. Will God reward faithfulness and kindness. Will God's Chesed reward Ruth's own Chesed?

Ruth on All Saints Day?

Does NAOMI's Bitterness contrast Ruth's Chesed? This bitterness is seen in several ways:

1. Naomi states, "I went away full, and the Lord has returned me back empty." This is not quite true. Ruth has returned with her and has pledged her undivided care to her for life.
2. She blames the Lord for dealing "Harshly" with her but does not acknowledge Abimelech's and her sons' culpability in how the events have unfolded. She uses language well known in Job, but unlike the narrative of Job, (where Job is described as righteous from the very start, "This man was blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil") the first chapter of Ruth places all the blame of the family's misfortune on Abimelech and his sons.
3. She seems to ignore Ruth for most of the return narrative, concentrating mostly on her misfortune. Yet, Ruth remained silently and faithfully by her side. By the end of the first chapter, Naomi's bitterness is contrasted with a Chesed that goes above and beyond the call of duty, the very definition of holiness. Should Ruth then be assigned to the All-Saints liturgy of our church. Should All Saints become our new Shavuot?

Let Us Pray

Dear Lord, Like Naomi, many of us have suffered moments of complete lostness and grief. There have been times when our hearts have become embittered by our circumstances and have failed to see any hope in the horizon. There have been times when we have felt completely alone, even though there have been faithful people silently standing by us all along. Today, as we finish Chapter One of Ruth, we ask you to rekindle our hope and our faith in your abounding grace and love. Help us to see you alive in our lives, walking alongside us in our journey, and supporting our weak faith at times of disillusionment and fear. Be with us today and give us the type of faith that goes above and beyond, a faith that waits quietly for your glory to be revealed and your will to come to pass. Fill us with your love that we may love others with singleness of mind and heart. In Jesus' holy name we pray. Amen!