

Ruth 1:19

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

So they two went until they came to Beth-lehem. And it came to pass, when they were come to Beth-lehem, that all the city was moved about them, and they said, Is this Naomi?

Analysis

The narrative notes the completion of their journey: **"So they two went until they came to Bethlehem. And it came to pass, when they were come to Bethlehem, that all the city was moved about them, and they said, Is this Naomi?"** The Hebrew emphasizes their partnership—"they two" (shetehem, שְׁתֵּיהֶם)—highlighting that Ruth and Naomi journey together as equals, not servant and mistress. The verb "went" (telakhnah, תֵּלַכְנָה) indicates their sustained traveling until reaching destination.

Bethlehem's reaction—"all the city was moved" (vateham kol-ha'ir, וַתָּהוּם כָּל־הָעִיר)—uses a verb meaning to be stirred up, excited, or disturbed. The entire community responds with commotion at their arrival. The question "Is this Naomi?" (hazot Na'omi, הֲזֹאת נָעֻמִּי) suggests shocked disbelief. The demonstrative "this" carries undertones of surprise or even horror—can this be the same woman who left?

The community's shock likely stemmed from multiple factors: Naomi's decade-long absence, her return without husband or sons, her physical deterioration from grief and hardship, and her unexpected companion—a foreign Moabite woman. Their question foreshadows Naomi's response in verse 20 where she rejects the name "Naomi" (pleasant) and asks to be called "Mara" (bitter). The narrative structure creates dramatic tension—Ruth has committed herself to Naomi and Israel, but what kind of reception will she receive?

Historical Context

Bethlehem ("house of bread") was a small agricultural village in the hill country of Judah, approximately six miles south of Jerusalem. Its population was likely only a few hundred people, making everyone's absence and return noteworthy. That "all the city" gathered suggests news of Naomi's return spread rapidly through the close-knit community. Ancient Middle Eastern villages functioned as extended families where everyone knew each family's history and circumstances.

Naomi and Elimelech would have been known community members before their departure to Moab, making their absence and the tragedy that befell them common knowledge. The decade between their leaving and Naomi's return (without her family) would have been discussed with sorrow. Her return with a Moabite daughter-in-law, given Deuteronomy 23:3-6's prohibition against Moabites, would have raised questions about propriety and community acceptance.

The timing of their arrival (verse 22 specifies the beginning of barley harvest) is providentially significant. They arrive not during barren winter but at harvest time when food is plentiful and gleaning opportunities exist. This demonstrates God's providential care—had they arrived months earlier during famine or months later after harvest, survival would have been much harder. The narrative's careful chronological notation (harvest beginning) shows divine timing orchestrating circumstances for provision and redemption.

Related Passages

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. What does the community's startled reaction to Naomi's changed circumstances teach about suffering's visible effects and the reality of grief's toll?
2. How should Christian communities respond when members return from seasons of devastating loss—with shocked questions or compassionate welcome?
3. What does Ruth's presence alongside Naomi demonstrate about faithfulness that persists even when the person we're committed to is diminished and broken?

Interlinear Text

וַתֵּלַךְ כָּנָה H1980	שְׁתֵּייהֶם H8147	עַד H5704	כְּבָאָה נָה H935	בְּ יֵת H0
	So they two		And it came to pass when they were come	
לְ חָם H1035	וַיְהִי י H1961	כְּבָאָה נָה H935	בְּ יֵת H0	לְ חָם H1035
to Bethlehem		And it came to pass when they were come		to Bethlehem
וַיִּהְיֶה כָּל H1949	הָעִיר H5892	עָלֶיהָ H5921	וַתֹּאמַר הָנָה H559	הִזְ אֵת H2063
was moved	that all the city		about them and they said	
נֶעְמִי: H5281				
Is this Naomi				

Additional Cross-References

Matthew 21:10 (Parallel theme): And when he was come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying, Who is this?

Isaiah 23:7 (Parallel theme): Is this your joyous city, whose antiquity is of ancient days? her own feet shall carry her afar off to sojourn.

Lamentations 2:15 (Parallel theme): All that pass by clap their hands at thee; they hiss and wag their head at the daughter of Jerusalem, saying, Is this the city that men call The perfection of beauty, The joy of the whole earth?

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