

Ruth 1:21

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

I went out full, and the LORD hath brought me home again empty: why then call ye me Naomi, seeing the LORD hath testified against me, and the Almighty hath afflicted me?

Analysis

Naomi continues her lament: **"I went out full, and the LORD hath brought me home again empty: why then call ye me Naomi, seeing the LORD hath testified against me, and the Almighty hath afflicted me?"** The contrast between "full" (male'ah, מְלֵאָה) and "empty" (reqam, רֵיקָם) structures her self-understanding. She left Bethlehem with husband and two sons—a complete family. She returns alone, without the relationships that gave her identity, security, and hope.

Significantly, Naomi says "the LORD" (YHWH, יְהוָה) brought her back empty and testified against her. This shifts from "Shaddai" (Almighty) in the previous verse to the covenant name. Her use of Yahweh indicates she still sees herself in covenant relationship with Israel's God, even while feeling He has become her adversary. The phrase "testified against me" (ana bi YHWH, עֲנֵה בִּי יְהוָה) uses legal terminology—God has witnessed against her in divine court, as if pronouncing sentence.

The parallelism "the LORD hath testified against me, and the Almighty hath afflicted me" reinforces her perception of God as the author of her suffering. The verb "afflicted" (hera li, הֵרָע לִי) means "has done evil to me" or "has brought calamity upon me." Naomi's theology here reflects the common ancient understanding that all circumstances—good and bad—flow from divine sovereignty. While incomplete (she doesn't yet see God's redemptive work through

Ruth), her theology rightly acknowledges God's comprehensive control over life's events.

Historical Context

The legal imagery of God "testifying against" draws from ancient Near Eastern court procedures where witnesses testified to establish guilt or innocence. Deuteronomy 28 contains the covenant curses that God promised would befall Israel for disobedience, including loss of children (28:32, 41) and widow status (28:54-57). Naomi may see her losses as evidence that God found her guilty of covenant violation and executed judgment accordingly.

However, the narrative's irony is profound: Naomi claims to return "empty" while accompanied by Ruth, who will prove to be worth "more than seven sons" (Ruth 4:15). Naomi's grief blinds her to God's providential provision already working. The woman she dismisses as negligible will become the mother of Obed, grandmother of Jesse, great-grandmother of David, and ancestress of the Messiah. God's redemptive purposes work even when recipients can't perceive them.

The timing of their return "in the beginning of barley harvest" (verse 22) further demonstrates divine provision Naomi doesn't yet recognize. Harvest time meant food availability and gleaning opportunities that will sustain them. God's testimony isn't against Naomi but for her—His providence has orchestrated every circumstance for restoration, though she can't yet see it.

Related Passages

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Psalms 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Study Questions

1. How does Naomi's feeling of divine testimony against her reflect the experience of suffering that seems to contradict God's love and promises?

2. What does Naomi's ironic description of returning "empty" (when Ruth accompanies her) reveal about how grief can blind us to present blessings?
3. In what ways does this verse model honest lament that doesn't abandon covenant relationship even while feeling abandoned by God?

Interlinear Text

אֲנִי	מְלֵאָה	הָלַכְתִּי	רֵיקָא	הָשִׁיבֵנִי	יְהוָה
H589	full	I went out	empty	hath brought me home again	and the LORD
	H4392	H1980	H7387	H7725	H3068
לָמָּה	תִּקְרָאֶנָּה	לִי	נָעַמְתִּי	יְהוָה	עָנָה
H4100	why then call	H0	ye me Naomi	and the LORD	hath testified
	H7121		H5281	H3068	H6030
וְשָׁדִי	וְהָאֱלֹהִים	הָרָעָה	לִי		
against me and the Almighty	hath afflicted		H0		
	H7706	H7489			

Additional Cross-References

Job 1:21 (References Lord): And said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.

Job 16:8 (Parallel theme): And thou hast filled me with wrinkles, which is a witness against me: and my leanness rising up in me beareth witness to my face.

Job 13:26 (Parallel theme): For thou writest bitter things against me, and makest me to possess the iniquities of my youth.

Job 10:17 (Parallel theme): Thou renewest thy witnesses against me, and increasest thine indignation upon me; changes and war are against me.