

¹³May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

14 I myself feel confident about you, my brothers and sisters, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, and able to instruct one another. ¹⁵Nevertheless, on some points I have written to you rather boldly by way of reminder, because of the grace given me by God ¹⁶to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. ¹⁷In Christ Jesus, then, I have reason to boast of my work for God. ¹⁸For I will not be so bold as to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to win obedience from the gentiles, by word and deed, ¹⁹by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit,^p so that from Jerusalem and as far around as Illyricum I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ. ²⁰Thus I make it my ambition to proclaim the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, so that I do not build on someone else's foundation, ²¹but as it is written,

"Those who have never been told of him shall see,
and those who have never heard of him shall understand."

22 This is the reason that I have so often been hindered from coming to you. ²³But now, with no further place for me in these regions, I desire, as I have for many years, to come to you

²⁴when I go to Spain. For I do hope to see you on my journey and to be sent on by you, once I have enjoyed your company for a little while.

²⁵At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem in a ministry to the saints, ²⁶for Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to share their resources with the poor among the saints at Jerusalem. ²⁷They were pleased to do this, and indeed they owe it to them, for if the gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service to them in material things. ²⁸So, when I have completed this and have delivered to them what has been collected,^q I will set out by way of you to Spain, ²⁹and I know that when I come to you I will come in the fullness of the blessing^r of Christ.

30 I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in earnest prayer to God on my behalf, ³¹that I may be rescued from the unbelievers in Judea and that my ministry^s to Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, ³²so that by God's will I may come to you with joy and be refreshed in your company. ³³The God of peace be with all of you.^t Amen.

16 I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon^u of the church at Cenchreae, ²so that you may welcome her in the Lord, as is

^p 15:19 Other ancient authorities read *the Spirit of God or the Holy Spirit* ^q 15:28 Gk *have sealed to them this fruit* ^r 15:29 Other ancient authorities add *of the gospel* ^s 15:31 Other ancient authorities read *my bringing of a gift* ^t 15:33 One ancient authority adds 16:25-27 here ^u 16:1 Or *minister*

15:14-33 Rome's Christ assembly and Paul's mission. Paul explains why he has written to his audience and how they fit into his travel plans. **15:14** *Full . . . filled.* Two different words/roots. The first has the sense of being full (like a container); the second, used elsewhere to speak of fulfilling Scriptures, emphasizing the act of filling. **15:16** *Minister.* Greek root "liturgy"; see 13:6. **15:17** Paul can boast because he is ultimately boasting of God's actions, not his own. **15:18** *Obedience from the gentiles.* Paul's mission is to bring disobedient gentiles into faithful obedience to God; see 1:5. **15:19** *From Jerusalem . . . Illyricum.* The geographic span of Paul's gentile mission. *Illyricum.* A Roman province that began in the east of Italy and extended southwest to the northeastern region of Greece. **15:21** Paul quotes Isa. 52:15. **15:24** *Spain.* The western end of the Roman Empire. **15:25-27** Paul's mission has included taking up a collection so gentiles can share their wealth with the poor of Jerusalem (see 1 Cor. 16:1-3; 2 Cor. 9:1-5). Before heading farther westward, Paul wants to deliver these funds to Jerusalem. **15:26** *Macedonia and Achaia.* Provinces of Greece. **15:31** *Rescued from the unbelievers in Judea.* *Unbelievers* is better translated as "those who are unpersuaded"—that is, those who are not convinced of the correctness of Paul's gospel and arguments. It is unclear who Paul has in mind; he refers to a specific subset of people in Judea (who could be Jews or gentiles / Roman authorities) and not everyone in Judea or all Jewish people.

16:1-27 Concluding greetings and farewell. Paul ends with a typical farewell that greets his audience by name. **16:1-2** Paul introduces Phoebe, a significant leader among Christ followers who traveled to Rome with Paul's letter. **16:1** *A deacon,* or "minister" (the same term used of Rome's authorities in 13:4). **Cenchreae.** The port city of Corinth. **16:2** Paul stresses Phoebe's leadership and authority, which is

fitting for the saints, and help her in whatever she may require from you, for she has been a benefactor of many and of myself as well.

3 Greet Prisca and Aquila, my coworkers in Christ Jesus, ⁴who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks but also all the churches of the gentiles. ⁵Greet also the church in their house. Greet my beloved Epaenetus, who was the first convert¹ in Asia for Christ. ⁶Greet Mary, who has worked very hard for you. ⁷Greet Andronicus and Junia,² my fellow Israelites who were in prison with me; they are prominent among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was. ⁸Greet Ampliatus, my beloved in the Lord. ⁹Greet Urbanus, our coworker in Christ, and my beloved Stachys. ¹⁰Greet Apelles, who is approved in Christ. Greet those who belong to the family of Aristobulus. ¹¹Greet my fellow Israelite Herodion. Greet those in the Lord who belong to the family of Narcissus. ¹²Greet those workers in the Lord, Tryphaena and Tryphosa. Greet the beloved Persis, who has worked hard in the Lord. ¹³Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and greet his mother—a mother to me also. ¹⁴Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas, and the brothers and sisters who are with them. ¹⁵Greet Philologus, Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them. ¹⁶Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you.

17 I urge you, brothers and sisters, to keep an eye on those who create dissensions and hindrances, in opposition to the teaching

that you have learned; avoid them. ¹⁸For such people do not serve our Lord Christ but their own appetites,³ and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the simple-minded. ¹⁹For your obedience is known to all; therefore, I rejoice over you, but I want you to be wise in what is good and guileless in what is evil. ²⁰The God of peace will shortly crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.⁴

21 Timothy, my coworker, greets you; so do Lucius and Jason and Sosipater, my fellow Israelites.

22 I Tertius, the writer of this letter,⁵ greet you in the Lord.⁶

23 Gaius, who is host to me and to the whole church, greets you. Erastus, the city treasurer, and our brother Quartus greet you.⁷

25 Now to God^b who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages²⁶but is now disclosed and through the prophetic writings is made known to all the gentiles, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith—²⁷to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever! Amen.⁸

¹ v 16.5 Gk *first fruits* w 16.7 Or *Junias*; other ancient authorities read *Julia* x 16.18 Gk *their own belly*
² y 16.20 Other ancient authorities lack this sentence
³ z 16.22 Or *I Tertius, writing this letter in the Lord, greet you*
⁴ a 16.23 Other ancient authorities add verse 24, *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with all of you. Amen.* b 16.25 Gk *the one* c 16.27 Other ancient authorities lack 16.25–27 or include it after 14.23 or 15.33; others put 16.24 after 16.27

greater than or equal to his own. *Benefactor*. More commonly “leader.” **16:3–16** Paul greets the people who he knows are part of Rome’s Christ assembly. The people Paul names offer important historical details about the demographics of Rome’s Christ assembly. Nine of these twenty-seven are women; ten are names commonly given to enslaved persons; at least eleven are names indicating they (or their ancestors) were immigrants to Rome. Many or most also would have been economically poorer, at most having subsistence-level means. **16:3** *Prisca and Aquila*. See 1 Cor. 16:19; Acts 18:2–3. **16:5** *First convert*. Literally “first fruit” or the beginning of an offering (see 8:23; 11:16). **16:7** *My fellow Israelites*. Note the term *Israelites* here (used in chap. 11). This term means “relatives/relations” or “of the same family.” *Junia*. Textual variants change the woman’s name to the male Junias, even as there is no external evidence for the name “Junias” in the Roman world. **16:12** *Tryphaena and Tryphosa*. A missionary couple of two women. **16:17** *Hindrances*. See chaps. 11, 14. **16:18** *Serve . . . their own appetites* connotes lack of self-control; see 1:18–32. *Serve*. Literally “enslaved”; see also 6:15–23. **16:20** *Satan* is from the Hebrew term meaning “adversary.” **16:21–23** More greetings from the people who are currently with Paul. **16:21** *Timothy*. Paul’s coworker / traveling companion (1 Cor. 4:17; 16:10; 2 Cor. 1:1, 19; Phil. 1:1; 1 Thess. 1:1; Philemon; Acts 16:1–3; 2 Thess. 1:1; Col. 1:1; see also 1 and 2 Timothy). **16:22** *Tertius*. The scribe Paul has employed to write the letter. **16:23** *Gaius*. Plausibly the Gaius whom Paul claims to have baptized in 1 Cor. 1:14. **16:24** The earliest manuscripts do not include this verse, found in the footnotes, and it almost certainly was added later.

faith among all the gentiles for the sake of his name, ⁶including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ,

⁷To all God's beloved in Rome, who are called to be saints:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

⁸First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed throughout the world. ⁹For God, whom I serve with my spirit by announcing the gospel^b of his Son, is my witness that without ceasing I remember you always in my prayers, ¹⁰asking that by God's will I may somehow at last succeed in coming to you. ¹¹For I long to see you so that I may share with you some spiritual gift so that you may be strengthened—¹²or rather so that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine. ¹³I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that I have often intended to come to you (but thus far have been prevented), in order that I may reap some harvest among you, as I have among the rest of the gentiles. ¹⁴I am obligated both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish, ¹⁵hence my eagerness to proclaim the gospel to you also who are in Rome.

¹⁶For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is God's saving power for everyone who believes,^c for the Jew first and also for the Greek. ¹⁷For in it the righteousness of God is revealed

through faith for faith, as it is written, "The one who is righteous will live by faith."^d

¹⁸For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and injustice of those who by their injustice suppress the truth. ¹⁹For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. ²⁰Ever since the creation of the world God's eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been seen and understood through the things God has made. So they are without excuse, ²¹for though they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their senseless hearts were darkened. ²²Claiming to be wise, they became fools, ²³and they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling a mortal human or birds or four-footed animals or reptiles.

²⁴Therefore God gave them over in the desires of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves. ²⁵They exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

²⁶For this reason God gave them over to dishonorable passions. Their females exchanged natural intercourse^e for unnatural, ^b1.9 Gk my spirit in the gospel ^c1.16 Or trusts ^d1.17 Or The one who is righteous through faith will live ^e1.26 Gk use

Paul. **1:8** *Your faith is proclaimed throughout the world.* Paul's audience is well known; therefore, they already have ideas and networks of their own. **1:14** *Both to Greeks and to barbarians.* "Barbarian" is a racialized term indicating foreignness from Greco-Roman culture. **1:16–17** *Thesis.* Paul summarizes his gospel. God's plan for justice involves all people: Jews first but now gentiles as well. **1:16** *For the Jew first and also for the Greek.* God's plan for justice/salvation started with God's covenant and promise to Jews but also includes gentiles, who are now being brought into God's justice through Jesus Christ's faith. **1:17** *Through faith for faith.* God's justice for gentiles is revealed through Jesus's faith in God for the faith of these gentiles (in God). *The one . . . by faith.* Paul quotes Hab. 2:4, interpreting it to be about Jesus.

1:18–32 *Gentile injustice and God's wrath.* Paul begins his gospel by laying out the situation of gentiles and why they are in need of a path to be made just by God. Gentiles have refused to acknowledge or have faith in God, and therefore they anger God and deserve God's wrath and punishment. **1:18** *Ungodliness and injustice.* *Ungodliness* emphasizes gentiles' lack of faith and obedience toward God. *Injustice* stands in contrast to God's righteousness (or "justice"). **1:19–21** These verses make clear that this passage discusses the specific situation of gentiles. While Jews have a faithful relationship with God, gentiles have the ability to honor and trust God but have not done so. **1:23** *They exchanged.* Verbs of trade characterize the situation of gentiles, beginning with their exchanging the worshiping of God for that of other gods. *Reptiles.* Romans often expressed racialized scorn and discomfort about how Egyptians supposedly worshiped snakes. **1:24–32** God becomes the active subject, taking control of gentiles, who subsequently lose control. **1:26–27** Paul gives the most detailed focus to sexual desires, specifically sex between people of the same gender identities (see "LGBTQIA2S+ Issues and Paul," p. 1935). **1:26** *Dishonorable passions.* Often associated with gentiles. The term carries sexual connotations in the Roman world; see 1 Thess. 4:5 and Rom. 7:5–6. *Their females.* Paul uses less common Greek

Reading through Time: LGBTQIA2S+ Issues and Paul (Romans 1)

Romans 1:18–32—especially vv. 26–27—draws the attention of LGBTQIA2S+ readers. They call this passage a “clobber text” due to its history of being interpreted as a condemnation of LGBTQIA2S+ identities, including its use to restrict their participation in churches and to justify violence against queer and trans people. While 1:18–32 is not the only clobber text in the Bible, it is the only biblical passage that specifically mentions sex between women. LGBTQIA2S+ interpreters have developed a number of interpretive approaches that respond to the abusive history of 1:18–32.

Many appeal to *historical context* by analyzing Paul’s words in light of first-century Roman sexual arrangements and the various discussions that surrounded them in literature and material culture. One approach emphasizes the difference between Roman and contemporary understandings of sexuality: Romans did not have an understanding of “sexual orientation” or LGBTQIA2S+ identities. Paul cannot condemn queerness because he lacks an understanding of same-sex practices as part of an identity. Others note that most same-sex intercourse in the Roman world was nonconsensual and involved the abuse of power, often in the context of slavery (it is worth noting that most heterosexual intercourse was similarly abusive). These readers interpret 1:18–32 as condemning abusive practices and suggest that Paul does not condemn consensual same-sex relations, especially in the context of monogamous marriage. Some observe how Paul’s condemnation of same-sex intercourse, specifically among the gentiles, replicates the Roman imperial language of self-control of desire. Roman morality condemned the lack of control over same-sex desires, calling them contrary to nature, especially in the case of sexual desire between women. Roman imperial morality saw these unnatural desires as indicative of foreignness—practices seen among the “nations” Rome conquered (“nations” and “gentiles” are the same word in Gk.).

In a different vein, some queer readers admit Paul’s statements present a negative view of same-sex desire and intercourse. Drawing from feminist biblical scholarship and queer studies, they analyze Paul’s rhetoric and resist his singular authority, emphasizing that Paul’s audiences frequently disagreed and argued with what he said—and that there were LGBTQIA2S+ people proudly existing in Paul’s first-century audiences.

Given the literal “clobbering” that 1:18–32 continues to justify, all readers should remember that interpreting it in a way that restricts the rights of marginalized populations and enables the physical or psychological harm of LGBTQIA2S+ people is fundamentally unjust and irresponsible.

27 and in the same way also the males, giving up natural intercourse^f with females, were consumed with their passionate desires for one another. Males committed shameless acts with males and received in their own persons the due penalty for their error.

28 And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them over to an unfit mind and to do things that should not be done. 29 They were filled with every kind of injustice, evil, covetousness, malice. Full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, craftiness, they are gossips, 30 slanderers, God-haters,^g

insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, rebellious toward parents, 31 foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. 32 They know God’s decree, that those who practice such things deserve to die, yet they not only do them but even applaud others who practice them.

2 Therefore you are without excuse, whoever you are, when you judge others, for in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, are doing the very same things. 2 We know that

^f 1.27 Gk use ^g 1.30 Or *God-hated*

One perspective of sex in first-century Rome viewed women as gender terms in this verse and the next. One perspective of sex in first-century Rome viewed women as the possessions of men. *Natural intercourse*. Literally “natural use.” *Unnatural*. Literally “against nature.” In Roman morality, women could “unnaturally” take an active sexual role with a man, but “unnatural,” with respect to women, most often referred to lesbian sex acts. 1:27. *In the same way*. The women’s unnatural intercourse is the same as the men’s. *Consumed with their passionate desires*. The epitome of lacking self-control. 1:28–32. A final string of injustices that spirals out from the gentiles’ lack of sexual self-control, which in turn stems from their refusal to worship God. 1:32. *Deserve to die* means they deserve wrath when God comes to judge all people.

2:1–16 **God’s impartiality: fictional dialogue with a gentile**. Paul explains the impartiality of God’s

Reading Guide

The story is elegantly structured in four symmetrical chapters that highlight the movement from loss to restoration. Chapter 1 consists of three scenes: a family history of loss (1:1–5), negotiation of kinship ties among women (1:6–18), and Naomi's lament before the women of Bethlehem (1:19–22). These scenes are rounded out by the three scenes of the final chapter: kinship negotiations among men (4:1–12), the women's celebration over Naomi's restoration (4:13–17), and a family history of abundant life (4:18–22). Similarly, the two middle chapters parallel each other, as Ruth moves back and forth between Naomi and Boaz to restore family ties and bring "seeds of hope" to Naomi. The steady movement from emptiness to fullness is further underscored by wordplays and images that are deftly woven throughout the story.

Many readers, past and present, have highlighted the book's depiction of *hesed* (kindness or covenant faithfulness) as its central theme (see "*Hesed*," p. 375). The principal characters embody this quality in their generous care for one another (1:8; 2:20; 3:10). Related to this motif is God's covenant faithfulness. The theological framework of the book affirms that fertile grounds and fertile marriages are ultimately divine gifts (1:6; 4:13); however, elsewhere in the story, God does not intervene directly, perhaps indicating that divine providence is at work via human agents. Indeed, human kindness and divine kindness work together to transform Naomi's sorrow to joy (1:8; 2:20). Finally, Ruth's Moabite background—emphasized repeatedly in the book (1:22; 2:2, 6, 21; 4:5, 10)—raises questions about how kinship ties may be forged across notions of otherness. The story's widespread use of dialogue invites its characters and readers alike to continue the conversation.

Eunny P. Lee

1 In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land, and a certain man of Bethlehem in Judah went to live in the country of Moab, he and his wife and two sons. ²The name of the man was Elimelech and the name of his wife Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon^a and Chilion;^b they were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah. They went into the country of Moab and remained there. ³But Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died, and she was left with her two sons. ⁴These took Moabite wives; the name of the one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth. When they had lived there

about ten years, ⁵both Mahlon and Chilion also died, so that the woman was left without her two sons and her husband.

6 Then she started to return with her daughters-in-law from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the country of Moab that the LORD had considered his people and given them food. ⁷So she set out from the place where she had been living, she and her two daughters-in-law, and they went on their way to go back to the land of Judah. ⁸But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go back each of you

^a 1.2 That is, *sickly* ^b 1.2 That is, *frail*

1:1–5 Migration to Moab. **1:1** *Judges*, military chieftains who ruled the tribes of Israel before the monarchy. The precise phrase *there was a famine in the land* occurs also in Gen. 12:10 and 26:1, where famine forces Israel's ancestors to forsake their homeland. In both cases, migrating into foreign territory endangers the matriarch and the future of the family. *Bethlehem*, five miles south of Jerusalem, was the home of David's family (1 Sam. 16:1–5). The conclusion of the story reveals that the future of the Davidic monarchy is at stake in the future of this family. *Moab* is located east of the Dead Sea in Transjordan. Biblical narratives acknowledge a distant kinship between Israel and Moab (Gen. 19:37; Deut. 2:9). But the relationship is often depicted negatively (see especially Num. 25:1–3; Deut. 23:3–6; Isa. 15; Ezra 9–10; Neh. 13). Here, Bethlehem (literally "house of bread") is ironically depleted by famine, and Moab offers sustenance. **1:2** *Ephrathites*, people of Ephrathah, another name for the region of Bethlehem (cf. 4:11; 1 Sam. 17:12).

1:6–18 The journey home. With the death of the men, the women take center stage; each must decide where home is. **1:6** The narrator reports divine activity twice, here and in 4:13. *Return*. The Hebrew verb ("shuv," translated also as "turn/go back") is used twelve times in this chapter. **1:8** The expression *mother's house* rather than the usual "father's house" occurs in narratives that highlight

Reading through Time: Ruth and Naomi (Ruth 1)

The relationship between Ruth and Naomi is at the heart of the book of Ruth, but this relationship has been understood in more than one way. As in-laws, their relationship is both familial and legal, but it moves beyond normal expectations. Among other features, this relationship is characterized by love and *hesed* (see “*Hesed*,” p. 375). The term *hesed* describes Ruth’s loyalty to and care of Naomi, which serve as an example of ethical behavior and even mirror God’s own relationship with God’s people.

Because the relationship between Ruth and Naomi is one of the only extended and positively portrayed bonds between women in the Bible—and because it connects two women of different ages, ethnicities, and religions—many interpreters have lauded it as a model for female solidarity and sisterhood. Some readers have even wondered if Ruth and Naomi might be romantically involved. Such an interpretation derives from Ruth’s passionate declaration of undying devotion (1:16–17); the note that she “clung” to Naomi (1:14), a verb that is sometimes used to characterize the marital bond (Gen. 2:24); and the community’s acknowledgment of Ruth’s love and Naomi’s parenthood of Obed (Ruth 4:15–17). Although none of these details point unequivocally to a romantic relationship, the amorous aspects of Ruth 1:16–17 may be tacitly acknowledged in how these verses are often read at weddings to this day. An understanding of Naomi and Ruth’s relationship as romantic in some fashion has played a role in the reception of the book, as in Fannie Flagg’s *Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Cafe* (1987; made into the movie *Fried Green Tomatoes* in 1991), Jeanette Winterson’s *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* (1985), and Amos Gitai’s film *Golem, the Spirit of the Exile* (1992).

If the nature of Ruth’s love for Naomi—platonic, familial, merely dutiful, or romantic—remains an open question, the same is true for Naomi’s feelings for Ruth. Indeed, her actions toward Ruth may be interpreted negatively. Naomi does not reciprocate Ruth’s passionate declaration in chapter 1; she proclaims herself empty when she returns to Bethlehem even though Ruth is at her side (1:20–21); she arranges for Ruth’s encounter with Boaz (3:1–4), perhaps using her daughter-in-law’s sexuality to procure her own economic security. Beautifully crafted but sparse, the text contains gaps and indeterminate language, thus rendering Ruth and Naomi’s relationship indeterminate as well.

Jennifer L. Koosed

to your mother’s house. May the LORD deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me. ⁹The LORD grant that you may find security, each of you in the house of your husband.” Then she kissed them, and they wept aloud. ¹⁰They said to her, “No, we will return with you to your people.” ¹¹But Naomi said, “Turn back, my daughters. Why will you go with me? Do I still have sons in my womb that they may become your husbands? ¹²Turn back, my daughters, go your way, for I am too old to have a husband. Even if I thought there was hope for me, even if I should have a husband tonight and bear sons, ¹³would you then wait until they were grown? Would you then refrain

from marrying? No, my daughters, it has been far more bitter for me than for you, because the hand of the LORD has turned against me.” ¹⁴Then they wept aloud again. Orpah kissed her mother-in-law goodbye, but Ruth clung to her.

¹⁵ So she said, “Look, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law.” ¹⁶ But Ruth said,

“Do not press me to leave you,
to turn back from following you!
Where you go, I will go;
where you lodge, I will lodge;
your people shall be my people
and your God my God.

women’s agency, especially when marriage may be in view (Gen. 24:28; Song 3:4; 8:2). *Deal kindly*, see “*Hesed*,” p. 375. **1:9** In patriarchal societies, women find social and economic security in marriage. **1:11** In Israelite law, when a married man died childless, his brother was to marry the widow to bear a child for the dead man’s family line and provide for the widow (Deut. 25:5–10). Naomi alludes to this practice but points to its impossibility in her case. **1:14** Some readers herald Orpah’s departure as an independent decision to honor her own roots. *Clung to her* indicates deep commitment, as in marriage (cf. Gen. 2:24). **1:16–17** These words are often invoked in marriage ceremonies; here, a woman commits herself to her mother-in-law (see “*Ruth and Naomi*,” p. 373). *May the LORD do thus*, a solemn oath formula.

¹⁷ Where you die, I will die,
and there will I be buried.
May the LORD do thus to me,
and more as well,
if even death parts me from you!”

¹⁸ When Naomi saw that she was deter-
mined to go with her, she said no more to
her.

¹⁹ So the two of them went on until they
came to Bethlehem. When they came to
Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred be-
cause of them, and the women said, “Is this
Naomi?” ²⁰ She said to them,
“Call me no longer Naomi;
call me Mara,^d
for the Almighty^e has dealt bitterly
with me.

²¹ I went away full,
but the LORD has brought me back
empty;
why call me Naomi
when the LORD has dealt harshly
with me
and the Almighty^e has brought
calamity upon me?”

²² So Naomi returned together with Ruth
the Moabite, her daughter-in-law, who
came back with her from the country of
Moab. They came to Bethlehem at the be-
ginning of the barley harvest.

2 Now Naomi had a kinsman on her
husband’s side, a prominent rich man
of the family of Elimelech whose name
was Boaz. ² And Ruth the Moabite said to
Naomi, “Let me go to the field and glean
among the ears of grain behind someone

in whose sight I may find favor.” She said to
her, “Go, my daughter.” ³ So she went. She
came and gleaned in the field behind the
reapers. As it happened, she came to the
part of the field belonging to Boaz, who
was of the family of Elimelech. ⁴ Just then
Boaz came from Bethlehem. He said to the
reapers, “The LORD be with you.” They an-
swered, “The LORD bless you.” ⁵ Then Boaz
said to his young man who was in charge
of the reapers, “To whom does this young
woman belong?” ⁶ The young man who was
in charge of the reapers answered, “She is
the young Moabite woman who came back
with Naomi from the country of Moab.”
⁷ She said, “Please, let me glean and gath-
er among the sheaves behind the reapers.”
So she came, and she has been on her feet
from early this morning until now without
resting even for a moment.”^b

⁸ Then Boaz said to Ruth, “Now listen,
my daughter, do not go to glean in anoth-
er field or leave this one, but keep close to
my young women. ⁹ Keep your eyes on the
field that is being reaped and follow be-
hind them. I have ordered the young men
not to bother you. If you get thirsty, go to
the vessels and drink from what the young
men have drawn.” ¹⁰ Then she fell prostrate,
with her face to the ground, and said to him,
“Why have I found favor in your sight, that
you should take notice of me, when I am a
foreigner?” ¹¹ But Boaz answered her, “All

c 1.20 That is, pleasant *d* 1.20 That is, bitter *e* 1.20 Tra-
ditional rendering of Heb *Shaddai* *f* 1.21 Or has testified
g 1.21 Traditional rendering of Heb *Shaddai*
h 2.7 Compare Gk Vg: Meaning of Heb uncertain

1:19–22 Naomi’s homecoming. The women of Bethlehem prompt Naomi to give fuller expression to her despair (cf. 4:17, where they celebrate her restoration). **1:20–21** Naomi’s lament evokes Job’s indictment of God (Job 27:2). *Almighty* (Hebrew “Shaddai”). This epithet for God is used frequently in Job and also in the ancestral narratives, where it is associated with the God of fecundity. Naomi’s usage is poignant in its irony.

2:1–3 Ruth’s strategy for survival. **2:1** *Prominent rich man.* The Hebrew expression connotes a man of great worth, in every sense of the word (cf. 3:11). **2:2** *Glean*, gathering leftover grain. Israelite law required landowners to extend this form of charity to widows, orphans, and foreign immigrants—those without land of their own (Lev. 19:9–10; 23:22; Deut. 24:19–22). Artist Jean-Francois Millet depicts the backbreaking nature of this work (*The Gleaners*, 1857). In the illustrations of Jewish artist David Wander, Ruth forages for recyclable cans (*Ruth*, 2011).

2:4–17 Boaz’s public hospitality. In kinship-based societies, women were important economic producers; here, they work alongside men in the fields of rural Bethlehem. **2:4** A character’s first words are telling, and Boaz appears on the scene pronouncing blessing. **2:5** He expresses interest in Ruth, probing the stranger’s connections to his community. **2:8–9** Boaz’s instructions point to Ruth’s vulnerability and signal that he will act as protector. **2:10** *Take notice* (“nakar”) and *foreigner* (“nokriyah”) come from the same Hebrew root. The verb may mean “recognize” or “treat

“The Word of God”: What Does the Bible Really Say? Additional Resources

- Westminster Study Bible (Westminster John Knox Press, 2024)
 - NRSVue translation, where text from handouts came from
 - Introductions and study notes are geared to accessibility and teaching
 - I wrote study notes for Romans
- Eli Conley (artist whose song we listened to, “When God Sets His Sights On You”)
 - www.eliconley.com

By Dr. Hoke:

- Sexuality and Paul’s Letters (*Bible Odyssey*)
 - <https://blog.bibleodyssey.org/articles/sexuality-in-pauls-letters/>
 - Very brief overview
- *Feminism, Queerness, Affect, and Romans: Under God?*
 - My book on queer wo/men around Paul’s letter to Rome
- “Widows, Sodomites, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Lectionaries?”
 - *Call to Worship* article on queer approaches to the lectionary
- More on Romans: A Conversation on Romans for Westminster Presbyterian Church adult ed
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ic-MvSsiFjQ>
- “Queering the Lectionary”: patreon.com/queerlectionary
 - Comments and reflections on weekly lectionary passages
- *Hungry for Hope: Letters to the Church from Young Adults* (forthcoming August 2025)
 - Collection of essays co-written by young adult + thought leader author teams, each on topics that young adults in the church have voiced as crucial to centering their needs in churches
 - “Liberating the Sanctuary: Beyond Marginalization and Inclusion to Reach Liberation” co-authored by Abby Grifno and Jimmy Hoke
 - <https://hungryforhopebook.com/>

Biblical Studies + Theology Resources:

- *Trans Biblical: New Approaches to Interpretation and Embodiment in Scripture*, ed. Joseph A. Marchal, Melissa Harl Sellew, and Katy E. Valentine
 - Forthcoming for Westminster John Knox, April 2025
- *Queer Theology: Beyond Apologetics* by Linn Marie Tonstad
- “Queer Theology”: four course series through Opening Doors to Discipleship and Covenant Network of Presbyterians
 - <https://odtd.net/queer-theology/>
 - I am a featured guest in Part #2!
- *Queer Bible Commentary* (2nd edition), Mona West and Robert E. Shore-Goss, editors