

Book of Ruth

Lesson 1

Welcome to the study of the Book of Ruth!

This Old Testament book is a classic short story, one of the most beautiful ever written. It is the account of a disillusioned Hebrew family who moves from their home in Bethlehem to the land of Moab because of a famine during the troubled times of the judges of Israel. In this strange land, they suffer disappointment, loss and pain. While the story describes their suffering, it also depicts a stunning account of family devotion, love and loyalty.

Most likely written around 1100 to 1000 B.C., the story reveals how God sovereignly and providentially works in the lives of His people to bring about their deliverance. The theme of Ruth can best be summarized by Proverbs 3: 5-6, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not to your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him and he will make your paths straight." Ultimately, Ruth and Boaz, the main characters in this book, play a significant role in God's plan of redemption for His people, for they become a part of the ancestral lineage of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of Man and the Son of God.

As you prepare to study, take a moment to pray and ask God for insight into this beautiful story of redemption.

Elimelech and Naomi

1. Read Ruth 1:1-2.
 - A. Who are the rulers over Israel, including Bethlehem in Judah, during the time of this story?

 - B. What is the problem for the people in the land?

 - C. At this point in the story the author introduces a family living in Bethlehem.
 - (1) List the names of the husband, his wife and their children.

 - (2) What do they decide to do?

 - (3) Do you think it was it wise to make this move? Please explain.

 - (4) Using a biblical map locate Moab. Where is Moab in relation to the Dead Sea?

Political & Cultural Condition of Israel

2. To gain some understanding of the political and cultural conditions that existed in Israel during the time of Elimelech and Naomi, read Judges 2:6-19 and Judges 21:25.
 - A. After the death of Moses, God appointed Joshua to lead his people into the promised land of Canaan (Joshua 1:1-9). After largely accomplishing this purpose, Joshua and his generation died (Judges 2:10), and a new generation grew up that was different from its predecessors.

From Judges 2:10-13, how is this new generation different regarding

- (1) its relationship with the Lord
 - (2) its religious activities, practices, and worship
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- B. Read Judges 2:14-15. By forsaking God and worshipping the gods of the people around them, this generation provoked Him to anger. What does the Lord do in response to their idolatry?

B. Compare the prevailing attitude of the people of Israel during the time of the judges with the prevailing attitude of people today. Cite specific examples from today's culture.

C. From your knowledge of Scripture and history, what courses of action might someone take to change direction personally or to help change society? (If needed, refer to Daniel 1:9-19 and Acts 2:22-39 for help developing your answer.)

- D. For personal reflection: What principles of change, personal or otherwise, have you seen bring about good? Describe the principles and the results they achieved. (If needed, consider the lives of Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9:1-19), Augustine, Martin Luther, William Wilberforce, John Newton, Martin Luther King or others.)

Elimelech's Family in the Land of Moab

6. Read Ruth 1:3-5.
- A. What happens to Elimelech? How does this affect Naomi?
- B. What do Naomi's two sons do?
- C. What are the names and the ethnicity of the women Naomi's sons marry?

D. After living about ten years in Moab, what happens to Mahlon and Kilion?

E. From Ruth 1:5, how does this affect Naomi, Orpah, and Ruth?

7. Read Ruth 1:6-7.

A. From verse six, how does the Lord providentially begin to encourage Naomi during this very painful time?

B. What do Naomi and her daughters-in-law decide to do?

C. What do you imagine that Naomi, Orpah and Ruth might have been thinking and feeling as they set out on the road to Judah?

D. Read Ruth 1:8-10.

(1) What do you find particularly poignant about Naomi's concern for the welfare of Orpah and Ruth? What words does she use to express her concern for them?

(2) How do Orpah and Ruth respond to Naomi's entreaty to leave her and return home? What does their response reveal to you about their relationship with Naomi?

(3) The conversation continues (Ruth 1:11-14).

(a) What subtle change of wording amplifies the closeness of the relationship between Naomi and Orpah and Ruth?

(b) What does Naomi add to her entreaty to Orpah and Ruth about returning to their home?

(c) From verse 14, how do Orpah and Ruth respond to Naomi's appeal to return home?

future to that of Naomi. She confessed allegiance to the people of Israel (your people) and to the God of Israel (your God). Here was a stirring example of a complete break with the past. Like Abraham, Ruth decided to leave her ancestors' idolatrous land to go to the land of promise. And Ruth did it without the encouragement of a promise. In fact, she made her decision despite Naomi's strenuous encouragement to do otherwise.

Ruth's decision was so strong that it included reference to death and burial. She would stay with Naomi to death and beyond. To seal the quality of her decision, Ruth invoked judgment from Israel's God if she were to break her commitment of loyalty to her mother-in-law. Ruth's conversion was complete. The events that followed show that her life matched her confession. (John W. Reed, The Bible Knowledge Commentary edited by John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck)

- D. Read Genesis 1:1-2, 12:1-3, 15:6, 17:1; Exodus 3:13-15; Psalm 51:1, 11, 17; Isaiah 9:6, 37:15-16, 44: 6; Matthew 28:18-19; John 8:31-58, 14:8-11 and 26, 20:24-30; Ephesians 4:30; and Galatians 3:6-9.
- (1) From these verses, describe the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Naomi, Ruth, David, Isaiah, Hezekiah, Matthew, Philip, Thomas, John and Paul.

(2) From Ruth 1:16-17 and the above verses, how might someone who desires to know God apply these truths?

E. From Ruth 1:18, how does Naomi respond to Ruth's determination to go with her?

Naomi and Ruth Arrive in Bethlehem

9. Read Ruth 1:19-22.

A. How do the townspeople, especially the women of Bethlehem, react to the arrival of Naomi and Ruth?

B. From Ruth 1:20-21, what is Naomi's response to the women?

- C. How might the truths of Deuteronomy 7:6; 1 Peter 2:9-10 and 5:10 apply to your life during times of personal difficulty, emptiness and affliction?