

**“The Book of Ruth”**  
**A Virtual Bible Study Series on Facebook Live**  
**Thursday Nights @ 7:00 PM**

**Introduction and Session 1: “Forsaking the Lord and Its Consequences”**  
**(Ruth 1:1-5)**

**Introduction**

The book of Ruth is an Old Testament short story told in four short chapters, a total of eighty-five verses long. When reading the book of Ruth, we need to understand the place it fits into the context of the Old Testament and the larger context of the Bible. In its pages, we get to see a glimpse of God’s transforming kindness through the servant’s heart of a woman (Ruth), the generosity of a man (Boaz), and the ultimate divine plan for an earthly and heavenly King (David, Jesus).

**A Story within the Unfolding Story of the Bible...**

The book of Ruth is set into a difficult time period for the tribes of Israel. From the opening verse in chapter 1, we are told this story falls within the time of when the “judges” ruled. Not too long ago, we journeyed through the stories of the Judges, and we examined this cyclical time of chaos for the tribes of Israel. Here is a quick reminder of the Judges’ cycle, the time period that the book of Ruth is set...

- The tribes of Israel turned their back on the Lord, worshipping the idols and false gods of the people around them.
- God was provoked to anger, allowing a neighboring group to overrun the people or specific tribe of Israel.
- In the midst of this great distress, the people of Israel cried out to God for help.
- In response, the Lord raised up a judge who saved them out of the hands of their oppressors.
- This ushered in a time of peace, until the judge died, and the people turned their back on the Lord again.

Most biblical scholars believe that the story of Ruth falls within the last few chapters of the book of Judges. A king was needed to bring an end to the cyclical chaos of the time. This is where the story of Ruth comes in. The family line of Ruth and Boaz, the two title characters from our short narrative, is the source of the future king of Israel, David. Through this narrative, God's transforming kindness to the nation of Israel was being laid out by birthing the future king.

The Hebrew word for this kindness is *hesed*, which literally means "loyal love". This kindness, or loyal love, that God shows to His people is modeled in the "loyal love" that Ruth shows to her mother-in-law, Naomi. This kindness, or "loyal love", was shown by Boaz to Ruth, as she was gathering food for her and Naomi. This kindness, or "loyal love", was shown by Jesus when He died on the cross for our sins. This *hesed* is what we Christians are called to share with others as we live our life of faith.

### **An Illustration of the Unfolding Story of the Bible**

The story of Ruth reveals three important features of how God works throughout the pages of scripture.

1. *God's control of the circumstances.*

The story of Ruth is narrated by an individual who highlights how certain details just "happen" to fall into place. For example, Ruth just "happened" to be gleaning in the field of Naomi's relative, Boaz. Bethlehem was a farming community. Many fields, many farmers. The "coincidence" that Ruth just happened to end up in Boaz's field is not by circumstance. God was in control of the details!

2. *God's use of apparently insignificant people.*

Ruth is a story of ordinary people. Naomi and Ruth are destitute widows. Ruth is a foreigner in a strange land – from a nation with a scandalous pedigree and a bad history with Israel. God chose to use the lowly, insignificant to change the course of history for the nation of Israel.

3. *God's provision of a redeemer.*

Redeem/redeemer/redemption occurs 23 times in the short verses of Ruth. Redemption is about the reversal of a bad situation, at the expense of a redeemer. Boaz served as the kinsman-redeemer for Ruth and Naomi. Jesus would serve as the redeemer for the world, all through the family line of Ruth and Boaz.

## **An Illustration of the Individual Stories with the Unfolding Story of Ruth**

As the Lord's plan is fulfilled through Naomi and Ruth, we are provided with illustrations of the way individuals are transformed by God's kindness.

- *The Lord transforms people caught up in the chaos of a rebellious world.*  
At the beginning of the story, Naomi was caught up in the chaos of the world around her – loss, desperation, and no hope. But then God acted out of transforming kindness. Where there was death, God brought new life. The Naomi in chapter 1 and the Naomi in chapter 4 are vastly different.
- *The Lord's transforming kindness is experienced as refuge is taken under the shadow of his wings.*  
"Under his wings" (Psalm 36:7) is a graphic picture of protection and security in times of trouble. This is what Ruth had done by aligning with Naomi, Naomi's people, and Naomi's God. All who take refuge in God find the same protection and security that she found.
- *The Lord uses apparently insignificant people as channels of his transforming kindness.*

Two destitute widows were the chosen channels of God's transforming kindness to his people. God continues to use, what others may see as insignificant, to make life-changing experiences for others. Just look at the other examples – Moses, Abraham, the Disciples, and Paul.

## **Session 1: "Forsaking the Lord and Its Consequences" (Ruth 1:1-5)**

Read Ruth 1:1-5

The book of Judges serves as the backdrop for our narrative found in the story of Ruth. As we read each of these verses, we must remember the "chaos" that is surrounding the tribes of Israel. There are consequences for the people of Israel turning their backs on God. Repeatedly, God handed "His people" over to the hands of raiders who plundered them, beating them both physically, emotionally, and spiritually. The people were in great distress. Judges were raised to assist, but as time went on, these periods of peace became shorter and shorter.

Ruth 1:1-5 helps us to understand three significant truths about living in a world where the Lord and his rules are ignored...

### **1. The Lord's warning of punishment is no idle threat.**

“Now it came about in the days when the judges governed, that there was a famine the land.” (vs. 1) This is no ordinary land we are talking about. This is the Promised Land that God had given to His people. The land “flowing with milk and honey.” So why a famine? Because God's punishment is no idle threat. In Leviticus, God had promised to bless the people if he followed his decrees, including the promise of rain in season to grow crops when needed. There was also warning to the people if they did not obey. Famine.

Even in Bethlehem, which literally means “house of bread”, a place of plenty, known for its fertile land and abundant grain harvests that provided much to eat, became victim to this punishment. God warns us of the reality of his anger against sin in both the past and the present. The Lord is slow to anger, but He does follow through. Ruth 1:1 reminds us that this punishment can come in many different forms.

### **2. Ignoring the Lord's rule is something to be taken seriously.**

Verses 1 and 2 move from telling us the setting and the scenario to a more intimate narrative, the story of a family. A man, Elimelech, and his family, move from the Promised Land – specifically Bethlehem in Judah – to the area of Moab because of the famine. Elimelech's name means, “God is King”, which reflects the right attitude that God's people should have, living in submission to Him. However, based on the time period and the actions of the larger people group, we can assume that Elimelech and his family were no different, doing as they saw fit. Elimelech was blessed with a wife, Naomi, whose name means “pleasant”, and two sons Mahlon and Kilion. One can assume they lived a prosperous life in Bethlehem, being a part of the prominent tribe of Judah.

When the famine came (punishment for the misdeeds of the people of Israel), his family traveled east of the Dead Sea to Moab. There was hostility between Moab and the tribes of Israel (it being of the tribes that oppressed the tribes during the period of the Judges). For this family to move to Moab, things must have been desperate in Bethlehem. The Moabites were descendants of Lot and a sordid incident with his daughter. Balak, the king of Moab, hired Balaam to

curse the Israelites. Upon entering the Promised Land, God commanded the tribes of Israel to make no treaties of friendships with the Moabites.

Whether Elimilech knew this long, dirty history, we do not know. He should have, if the history and laws were read every seven years as it was instructed. His intent was to only move there for a short period of time, but verse two says they “remained there.” This move became a death sentence. Elimelech dies while they are living in Moab, and this changes the scenario. The two sons, Mahlon and Kilion, are then thrust into being in charge of the family. They choose brides from the land of Moab, a command that God had told His people not to do before. Had Elimilech not chosen to move to Moab, these weddings would never have happened. Orpah and Ruth are the chosen brides. Interestingly, the meaning of the boy’s names – Mahlon meaning “to be sick” and Kilion meaning “failing or pining” – serves as a precursor to their ultimate fate. After ten years, they too grow sick and die while in Moab. This leaves Naomi, Orpah, and Ruth, as widows in the land of Moab.

This family had left the Promised Land to move to Moab to “save” their family, and their plans failed. Naomi is learning firsthand that ignoring God’s rules is something to be taken seriously.

### **3. Tasting the Lord’s bitter pill prepares the way for experiences of his kindness.**

After the first five verses, we may be wondering how God’s transforming kindness is going to reveal itself to Naomi and Ruth in this story. Even through the rest of chapter one, we see from Naomi’s words that she feels that God’s hand has come out and down against her. Even in the midst of the bitter pill that she was swallowing, she knew that the Lord was still in control. What we will see – and what Naomi will recognize – is that this time of bitterness and pain was preparing her for God’s transforming kindness. We see this in the story of Joseph with the famine and restoration of family. We see this with famine in the time of Elijah and the people turning back to Him. We also see this in the Parable of the Prodigal Son, a time of famine and loss, leading to a return to the Father. The Lord can use bitter experiences to prepare the way for undeserved kindness.

In verse 6, we start seeing a little glimpse of hope in the midst of the darkness. God is starting to reveal Himself, not just to Naomi, but also to the tribes of Israel. Hope is coming for all.

### **Follow Up Questions...**

1. "The Lord does not do coincidences." How should this truth help us in our daily lives? How can we use the implications of this truth to help and encourage others, perhaps those who are in difficult situations?
2. How does the very "ordinariness" of the story of Ruth encourage us as we live our lives?
3. What experiences have you had of bitter trials preparing the way for the Lord's kindness?
4. How can we best help a Christian friend who is tasting a bitter pill from the Lord?

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**Session 2: "Patterns of the Lord's Kindness" (Ruth 1:6-22)**

**Thursday, September 16 7:00 PM**

**Facebook Live**