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Ruth: The Kindness & Providence of God

A 2-Week Study

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Ruth: Week 1

Introduction/In the Fields of Moab (1:1-21)

Day 1

1. The goal today is to get an overall feel for this short book. Read through the whole book in one sitting if you can.
2. As you do, note any repeated words or phrases. Note especially the repetition of a form of the word *kind* in the first three chapters. With the exception of its use in 2:13, the word comes from the Hebrew word *hesed*. Look this word up in a concordance or other source and write the definition of this multi-faceted word below:
3. Note the repetition of the words *return* and *turn back* in chapter 1.
4. Other observations:

Day 2

1. Read through the book again. As you read, you may notice that the narrator himself does not present much commentary. Much of the theology of the book is presented through the speech of its characters. What do the words of each of the following reveal about God:

- Naomi:

- Ruth:

- Boaz:

- Others (field workers, women, townspeople):

- Narrator:

2. If you've read or studied the book of Judges, how do the characters in Ruth present a refreshing contrast to most of those in Judges?

3. The end of the book somewhat unexpectedly draws attention to the descendents of Boaz and Ruth, climactically ending with David, the most famous king of Israel. How does God providentially bring his plans into place throughout the whole book in preserving David's ancestral line?

Day 3

1. Read **Ruth 1:1-5**.
2. The very first part of verse 1 describes part of the setting of the book of Ruth; what was this time? How does Judges 21:25 generally describe this time?
3. The next phrase describes the situation which led to Elimelech deciding to leave the land of Israel. What was this situation? We already know that this was during the time of the judges, much of which was characterized by idolatry and other evil. In Lev 26:19-20; Deut 28:15-24 what had God warned that he would do if Israel was disobedient and idolatrous?
4. Ironically, Elimelech and his wife Naomi, along with their sons Mahlon and Chilion were from Bethlehem, literally “the house of bread.” The famine was likely widespread as they had to cross over the Jordan River to get to their destination—Moab. Whereas God had promised Israel that if they turned in repentance, he would again bring blessing (cf. Deut 29:1-10), Elimelech decided to deal with the famine in his own way—by leaving Israel for Moab. Moab, on the other hand, was a country with quite the negative history with Israel. Note the country’s origin, as well as Israeli dealings with Moab both distant

and closer at hand: Genesis 19:30-38; Numbers 22-24; Numbers 25:1-9; Deuteronomy 23:3-6; and Judges 3:15-30.

5. Despite their leaving to escape death by starvation in Israel, what happened to Elimelech in Moab (another sign of punishment for an Israelite; cf. Amos 7:17)? The focus immediately turns to Naomi; how does verse 3b describe her?

6. These two sons took Moabite wives—Ruth and Orpah—before they died 10 years later, having had no children. How are we to view these marriages and this childlessness? What does Deut 7:3-4 and 28:32 say about marrying a foreigner? What does Deut 28:18 indicate about a possible cause for childlessness?

7. Again, the focus turns immediately to Naomi. How is she described in verse 5b?

Day 4

1. Read **Ruth 1:6-18**.
2. After 10 years in Moab, while grieving the loss of her husband and sons, Naomi heard some news while she was in the fields of Moab; what did she hear? What did she immediately do? (Note in this chapter the repetition of the word *return*.)
3. Orpah and Ruth initially set out with Naomi to *return* to the land of Judah. Naomi stops the girls and tells them to *go return* to their mothers' homes. As a farewell blessing, what did she pray for them?
4. In verses 11-13, Naomi gives what three arguments as to why her "daughters" should not return with her to Bethlehem and instead return to their families?
5. In verse 13, we are finally given some insight into Naomi's theology. What is her view of all that had befallen her?

6. After all crying some more, Orpah apparently kissed her mother-in-law goodbye, but Ruth continued to cling to Naomi. Again, Naomi reveals some of her theology when she urges Ruth to do what—as Orpah had done—in verse 15?

7. Ruth responded, telling Naomi to stop trying to get her to return and abandon her. Instead, what did she promise?

8. Ruth sealed her promised to transfer her familial and national membership from Moab and its gods (Chemosh and others; cf. Num 21:29) to Israel and its God. She made a vow before the LORD (God’s covenant name, Yahweh) that he would hold her accountable if anything but death parted her from Naomi. This was definitely a step in the right direction, especially compared to Orpah as she returned to her gods. From what we have seen of Naomi’s faith and theology, Ruth understood enough to make a vow in the name of Israel’s covenant God and to abandon the gods of her home and family. Any thoughts on this?

9. What was Naomi’s response to Ruth’s declaration and vow?

Day 5

1. Read **Ruth 1:19-21**.
2. So now just the two of them—Naomi and Ruth—continued on their journey to Bethlehem. What was the reaction of the whole town?
3. What did the women ask when they saw Naomi? What does this reaction reveal about what Naomi's 10 years in Moab had done to her?
4. When the women ask if she is Naomi, Naomi responds that they are not to call her Naomi any longer but rather Mara. What does the name *Naomi* mean? What does the name *Mara* mean (cf. Ex 15:23)?
5. Naomi gives the reason for her request that the women of Bethlehem call her Mara. What was it (v 20)?

Most Bibles will have at least some cross-references that explain the meaning of names that have significant meanings. If yours doesn't, a study Bible, concordance, or Bible dictionary might be helpful.

Ruth: Week 2

Chapters 2-4: Back to Bethlehem & Blessing

Day 1

1. Read **Ruth 1:22-2:13**.
2. Ruth 1:22 recaps the important information from chapter and adds a bit more detail. Naomi *returned* with Ruth the Moabite, her daughter-in-law, *returning* from Moab and coming to Bethlehem. The timing is significant, as it sets the stage for this chapter. It also means there is food again, the first of all the crops harvested beginning in late April/early May. When did they return to Bethlehem?
3. In 2:1, the narrator gives us a heads up about a character we will soon meet. How does the narrator describe Boaz and how does he relate to Naomi?
4. The narrator does a good job building his story. The setting is during barley harvest, there's a relative of Naomi's named Boaz, and then there is "Ruth the Moabite" in verse 2. What does Ruth request to do and how do all three of these factors (barley harvest, Boaz, and Ruth) come together in verses 3-4?
5. Ruth had hopes that she might glean in a field of one who would show her favor/be gracious. Look up the following passages: Lev 19:9-10; 23:22; Deut 24:19. What did God's law demand for the poor, widow, and foreigner (all three were characteristic of Ruth)? Recall, though, that the larger setting was during the times of the judges, so many people were not following the law, thus Ruth's hope to find someone gracious.

6. In the events that follow, the narrator draws attention to God's "hidden hand of providence" by the way he tells the story. In verse 3, Ruth "happened to come" (the Hebrew giving the understanding of a "stroke of good luck") to Boaz's field. Then, how does the narrator get the reader's attention to notice that the owner of the field—Boaz—also came to the field in Bethlehem at the same time?

7. Now that the attention is on Boaz, we get some insight as to what kind of a man he is simply by his greeting to his field workers and their response to him. Note them below.

8. Boaz noticed Ruth (a young woman) and asked his reaper supervisor (a young man compared to Boaz) to whom she belonged. How did this young man describe Ruth?

9. Clearly, Boaz proved himself to be gracious. What did he tell Ruth ("my daughter," a parental term and again emphasizing his older age) in verses 8-9?

10. When Ruth bowed down in response and questioned his favor and notice of a foreigner (v 10), Boaz said that he had been told all Ruth had done for Naomi after the death of Ruth's own husband, as well as her willingness to leave her family and home to come to a people she didn't know. What blessing did Boaz bestow on Ruth in verse 12, which Ruth recognized as being fulfilled in part how (v 13)?

Day 2

1. Read **Ruth 2:14-23**.
2. How does Boaz continue to show kindness to Ruth, again being the means of God's wings of refuge for this poor, foreign widow (14)? (This must have amazed Ruth, as she looked at herself as less than even Boaz's servants and she had no idea the familial relation between Elimelech and Boaz.)
3. What further instructions did Boaz give his workers when Ruth got up to glean some more? How does this further build your understanding of Boaz as a "worthy" man?
4. Ruth worked hard, gleaning until evening, after which she beat out the barley to get the grain. She yielded a huge amount of barley, an ephah weighing between 30-50 pounds (people are unsure exactly how much an ephah was). She brought it home to Naomi in the city and also pulled out her leftovers from lunch. Naomi—shocked—asked what of Ruth and then said what of the unknown benefactor before Ruth answered?
5. When Naomi found out that the field belonged to Boaz, she again asked that the man be blessed, but this time she also recognized the kindness (*hesed*) of the LORD. The Naomi who charged the Almighty for dealing very bitterly with her in bringing calamity and emptiness upon her now notes his kindness. What reason does she give for this change of mind about God's actions toward her (v 20)?

6. A redeemer was a legal term in Old Testament law for a family member who helped out another relative in great need. Look up the following passages to better understand the various roles of redeemers. They could buy land from a relative who was poor until he could buy it back to keep land in the family (Lev 25:25-28). If a poor man sells himself into servitude to pay off debts, a redeemer could buy him (Lev 25:47-55). A relative might function as an avenger of one who was murdered (Num 35:12, 19-27). A near relative might receive restitution money if the original victim was dead (Num 5:8).
7. Interestingly, in all of those verse about redeemers, there is no mention of a redeemer *marrying* a needy family member. This is a different law, relating to brothers, called the law of levirate marriage. Note the law in Deut 25:5-10. (If you want an example of this, read the story of Judah's sons and Tamar in Genesis 38.) Whatever the exact particulars of the laws, Naomi, as we will see, merged the two concepts. What we know now is that her hope in the LORD's kindness has been brought back.
8. Ruth (the Moabite the narrator again calls her, perhaps to highlight the clash of Israelite/Moabite culture) responds with even more good news for Naomi in verse 21. What else does she say?
9. Naomi was glad to hear this—especially in such an ungodly time as the time of the judges—why?
10. What summary of the next 6-7 weeks does the narrator give in verse 23?

Day 3

1. Read **Ruth 3:1-13**.
2. With no further word from Boaz (during these following 6-7 weeks of harvesting) beyond his initial kindness in allowing Ruth to continue to generously glean from his field untouched, Naomi comes up with a plan. Remember in 1:9 Naomi had prayed for rest and security for her daughters-in-law in finding a husband. Now that Ruth is living with Naomi, apparently Naomi felt it was her responsibility to do what, according to verse 1? Whom did she think was a good choice for Ruth?
3. Naomi knew that Boaz would be threshing that night (nighttime breezes probably were easier to deal with for the winnowing process). What instructions did she give Ruth?
4. Naomi's instructions to Ruth are understandably confusing. There are several theories about her instructions.
 - One possibility is that that, similar to David in 1 Sam 12:20, Naomi's instructions were in part to end the mourning period of Ruth in her widowhood and communicate to Boaz that she was willing to remarry.
 - Some believe Naomi's instructions to be that of encouraging Ruth to act like a prostitute (as prostitutes would offer themselves to men at the threshing floor). Some of the language can be interpreted sexually. However, the language can also be interpreted simply as it is. Also, with no mention of Boaz getting drunk, and with his being described as a worthy man and then, upon waking, his pronouncing blessing from the LORD on Ruth, it is unlikely that such was the case.
 - Naomi's plan was a risky one. It would all depend on how Boaz would respond when he was suddenly awakened in the middle of the night (because his feet were uncovered and cold) to find a woman sleeping at his feet. He could be groggy and think she was a prostitute and treat her as one (as many in the times of the judges might) or send her away from him (as he was described as a worthy man). Or, he could somehow interpret that Ruth—a younger Moabite female field worker—is proposing to Boaz—and older Israelite male field owner.

5. Naomi had faith that the latter would be true as she told Ruth that Boaz would tell her what to do. What was Ruth's response to these instructions?

6. Ruth followed Naomi's instructions (vv 6-7). Verses 8-9 give the perspective of Boaz. What did he do?

7. In response to Boaz's question as to who she was, Ruth not only answered it but went on to boldly do what? In essence, she asked that Boaz be the own answer to his prayer/blessing for her in 2:12.

8. What was Boaz's response to Ruth? What was his opinion of her and her actions?

9. What was the wrinkle in the plan that Boaz mentioned? What did he plan to do?

10. What instruction did he give Ruth (v 13)?

Day 4

1. Read **Ruth 3:14-4:12**.
2. Ruth lay at Boaz's feet until morning (note that it doesn't say she slept!). When did she get up and what did Boaz say? Why was this important?
3. Before Ruth left, Boaz filled up part of her clothing—a scarf or shawl, likely—with 6 measures of barley, perhaps out of generosity or evidence of his promise or as a cover for why Ruth was there if anyone had seen her (or all of the above). When Ruth returned home, Naomi immediately asked her how things went. Ruth explained and said that Boaz had given her the barley so she wouldn't return empty-handed to Naomi. Naomi may have realized that Boaz understood the nature of a redeemer—that he was Elimelech's relative, thus his redemption primarily involved Naomi and her land. Perhaps he understood too that this had been Naomi's plan. He could have also been giving a "down payment" on the bride-price and a guarantee that he would act if he could. What was Naomi's response and instruction to Ruth?
4. Naomi's confidence in Boaz was not misplaced. 4:1 tells us that Boaz did what?
5. When Boaz sat at the gate (a common place for business/legal transactions), what surprising (providential!) thing happened?

6. After inviting the other redeemer who “just happened” to be walking by, Boaz found 10 elders of the city to function as witnesses. In 4:3-4, Boaz explains the situation to the other redeemer. Summarize it below.

7. The other redeemer said that he would redeem the land for Naomi, but then Boaz explained that if he did so he’d have to also marry Ruth the Moabite for what purpose? (Technically, this was not a legal requirement, but Boaz was following the spirit of the law by merging marriage/progeny with land.) What was the other redeemer’s response to this additional responsibility?

8. After the other redeemer formally bowed out, handing over his sandal as a legal means of sealing the deal, Boaz spoke to the elders and others who had gathered. He begins and ends his speech by saying they were witnesses to what two aspects of this transaction (one of which the readers know was Boaz’s primary motivation)?

9. The elders and the people accept their responsibility as witnesses, by repeating Boaz’s term, “witnesses!” But they also go on to give a 3-part blessing on Ruth, Boaz, and his house. Describe each part of the blessing below. Why do you think the people compared Ruth and Boaz’s household to that of Perez (cf. Gen 38)?

Day 5

1. Read **Ruth 4:13-22**.
2. At least nine months is squeezed into verse 13. Boaz married Ruth as he had promised he would if he could. Notice how the narrator phrases Ruth's pregnancy: "The LORD gave her conception, and she bore a son." Remember that after 10 years of marriage to Mahlon in Moab, Ruth had remained childless. What does this verse communicate about God?
3. Most likely recalling Naomi's bitter words to the women of the town about a year earlier on her return to Bethlehem that the LORD had dealt bitterly with her in bringing calamity and emptiness to her, the women now speak to Naomi and bless the LORD in light of the change in her circumstances. They praise him for not leaving Naomi without a redeemer. Read verses 14-15; whom are they referring to as the redeemer here?
4. Just as the people had expressed a blessing on behalf of Boaz and his name being renowned in Bethlehem (4:11), the women do the same for Boaz's son, that his name would be renowned where?
5. Verse 15a now clarifies in what way Naomi's grandson would function as her "redeemer" (contrasted with Boaz's legal role as redeemer). What would her grandson do for her?
6. Beyond this, it was Naomi's daughter-in-law Ruth who gave birth to this boy, her redeemer. How did the women describe Ruth, likely recalling again her bitter comments a year earlier about returning to Bethlehem "empty" (1:21)?

12. What did this book teach you about God and his working?

13. How did this book exemplify the true meaning of love and kindness (*hesed*)?