

Judges & Ruth

God's *Faithfulness* Remains

women's | BIBLE STUDY

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LESSON *Fifteen*

Naomi's Emptiness

Take a moment to breathe. After the heartbreak, sin, and death of Judges, you will find life and hope in Ruth. After much darkness, there is light. And after what seems to be silence, the hands of a redemptive and kind God are at work. Pause, breathe, and be encouraged. He always works all things out for the good of those who love Him. At the opening of the book of Ruth, all hope seemed lost. Naomi, an Israelite, had settled in a foreign land and had lost her husband and sons. Intent on returning to Israel alone, Naomi sent her daughters-in-law back to their families. However, Ruth refused, committing to stay with Naomi no matter the cost. The famine in Israel ended and harvest season began. Hope was just around the corner.

HELPFUL HINTS FOR STUDYING RUTH:

Ruth was a hero in the time of the judges. She was a foreigner from a pagan land, one outside of God's chosen people. Yet, while Israel turned to sin and was overwhelmed by enemy oppression, Ruth turned toward God and experienced His goodness. While everyone else was doing what was right in their own eyes, Ruth was faithful.

While the book of Judges is about Israel's failure, the book of **Ruth is about God's redemption.** To redeem means to buy back or release in exchange for payment. In this book, a man by the name of Boaz redeemed Ruth, rescuing her and her mother-in-law from poverty and possibly death. Boaz, however, simply points to a greater Redeemer to come, Jesus Christ. In the New Testament, Jesus' death paid your debt to release you from the bondage of sin. If you believe in Jesus, you are redeemed. You are saved from eternal separation from God, able to walk in freedom, and one day will reign with Jesus forever. Do not miss this theme as you are reading. Rather, allow it to point you to the One True Redeemer, Jesus.

Finally, look for awe-inspiring kindness. When you know God's kindness, it's possible to share it with other people. Ruth and Boaz demonstrated loyal kindness toward others and each other; yet, this kindness is most clearly seen through God, given that the story took place amid Israel's season of great sin—the time of the judges. God was still faithful to His covenant with Israel.

CHALLENGE YOURSELF

The book of Ruth is only four chapters. Challenge yourself to read the entire book as you begin. This gives you the bigger picture before you zoom into the details of the text.

OPPOSITE

"The story [of Ruth] is a mirror opposite of Israel's depressing journey from triumph to tragedy that is presented in the book of Judges."⁸¹

Before starting your study of Ruth, reflect on your time in Judges. What did you learn about God? What, if any, unresolved frustration or confusion did you develop with God? Write these things down and discuss them with your small group.

Read the Introduction (pages 8-10) and Ruth 1 before answering the following questions.

1. Redemption is a major theme in the book of Ruth. First, look up the definition of redemption in the appendix and make notes in the space below. Then, take a minute to pray. If you know Jesus, reflect on His character. Thank Him for the things from which He has redeemed you. If you don't know Jesus, talk to Him about your hesitations. Either way, ask God to open your eyes to the truth of His character through this book. Write down any reflections you might have. (See Appendix: Redemption.)

Read Ruth 1:1-5.

2. According to verse 1, when did the story of Ruth take place? From your study over the last two semesters, what do you know about this time period?

3. From verses 1-5, what do you learn about the following characters?

<p>ELIMELECH "My God is King"</p>	
<p>NAOMI "beautiful, pleasant"</p>	
<p>MAHLON & CHILION "sickly, dying"</p>	
<p>ORPAH "back of the neck"</p>	
<p>RUTH "friendship or refreshment"</p>	

CARE FOR THE VULNERABLE

One of the defining characteristics of God in Scripture is that He cares for the needy, hopeless, and vulnerable. Look for this throughout the story of Ruth.

NAOMI

Despite Ruth being the namesake of the book, the main character of the story is actually Naomi. Closely watch her actions and growth as you read.⁸²

FAMILY

At the time of this passage, family was everything: protection, a sign of God's blessing and favor, the means of food, shelter, and more.

ABANDONING GOD

The Moabites were longstanding enemies of Israel. It is worth noting that by moving to Moab, this family abandoned the Promised Land and trust in God's provision, to go somewhere God was not worshiped.

FAMINE

It is possible that the famine in the land was God's divine judgment on Israel for their disobedience. See Deuteronomy 11:13-17, 28:48, and 32:24.

NAMES

Names in the book of Ruth hold significant meaning. Look for new names to be defined throughout the study.

MARRIAGE

Naomi was in trouble. Due to her age, the fact that she was widowed, and that she was living in a foreign land, she had very few prospects for provision and protection. During this time, a husband meant a woman would at least have food and shelter.

HESED

Ruth 1:8 mentions the Hebrew word “hesed” for the first time. The hesed love of God and others will be a consistent theme in Ruth.⁸³

PSALM 146

“The Lord watches over the sojourners; He upholds the widow and the fatherless, but the way of the wicked He brings to ruin.” Psalm 146:9

COMMITMENT TO GOD

The Moabites did not worship Israel’s God. See Naomi’s statement about Orpah returning to her gods in Ruth 1:15. That meant that Ruth’s declaration was bigger than just moving to another country. Her commitment to Naomi was also a commitment to the One True God of Israel.

4. The situation by the end of verse 5 feels hopeless. List the hardships you see in this passage.

Hesed is the Hebrew word for the steadfast, loyal, covenant love of God. It is entrenched in God’s mercy, grace, and kindness. It is a quality that causes a person to act without thought to what they might gain in return. “As for you, O Lord, you will not restrain your mercy from me; your steadfast love (hesed) and your faithfulness will ever preserve me!” Psalm 40:11

Read Ruth 1:6-18.

5. Describe Orpah’s and Ruth’s reaction to Naomi’s request. Considering this, what do you discover about their relationship with Naomi, their mother-in-law? How does this encourage you?
6. Naomi desired provision and comfort for her daughters-in-law. Ruth, however, wanted more. Meditate on Ruth’s beautiful declaration in verses 16-17. Why would Ruth make such a declaration? In light of Naomi’s circumstances, what were some of the implications of Ruth’s choice?
7. Ruth left everything she knew to follow Naomi, and ultimately, to follow God. She made a great sacrifice out of love. Define sacrifice. How is Ruth’s sacrifice an example of *hesed* love?

How do Ruth's actions point us to Jesus? (See John 15:13, Mark 10:45, and Ephesians 5:2.)

Be encouraged. Ruth made a great sacrifice, yet God was with her. She was not just leaving everything she knew; she was stepping into the care of a loving and kind God. Her journey was just beginning. "To fall in love with God is the greatest romance; to seek Him the greatest adventure; to find Him, the greatest human achievement."

— Augustine ⁸⁴

8. Take a moment and think about how you are doing at sacrificially loving people. When have you done whatever it takes to care for others? What distracts you from doing this more often? (Ex: busyness, selfishness, etc.) Who in your sphere of influence will you commit to sacrificially love this week? (See Appendix: Love.)

Read Ruth 1:19-22.

9. Naomi described her situation to the people of Bethlehem upon her return. From her point of view, what had happened? (See also Ruth 1:13.)
10. Imagine you are Naomi. You have lost everything: your home, husband, and children. The grief is overwhelming and bitterness against God has settled deeply. Use the space below to write a short note to God as if you were Naomi. How would you feel and what things would you pray for?

RUTH'S RESPONSE

Naomi asked Ruth to return home four times. Ruth's response was overwhelmingly clear: she would not leave Naomi, no matter the cost.

SALVATION BY FAITH

Ruth was not an Israelite. She was not part of God's covenant people. Yet, due to her faith, she was brought into God's family. Salvation has been and will always be by grace, through faith alone (Genesis 15:6). Do not miss the gravity of Ruth, a gentile, leaving everything behind to follow the God of the Israelites.

BETHLEHEM

Bethlehem and Moab were on opposite sides of the Dead Sea. This journey from Moab would have been 70-100 miles, a journey that would have taken about a week on foot. Don't forget to look at the map on page 11.⁸⁵

"BITTER"

Mara means "bitter." This word for bitter is also used in Job 27:2 and Zechariah 12:10, both instances of great loss and hurt. Naomi's name choice reveals her deep pain.

GOD CARES

God made Himself clear in Scripture: He cares for the widow. For evidence, read Deuteronomy 10:15-18.

EMPTY VS. FULL

A common theme in Ruth is the contrast between being empty and full. Notice this theme in Ruth 1:21 and look for it in the upcoming chapters. You can feel empty apart from God's promises, yet when you trust in Him, you are a recipient of His abundant kindness which is ultimately fulfilled in Jesus.

11. Explain a time when you could identify with Naomi and felt empty and/or bitter at God. How did God intervene or are you still waiting?
12. The story of Ruth reminds us that though sometimes life is difficult, God's faithfulness remains. Go back through the passage and circle any mention of God. Where do you see Him at work in this passage? In what ways do you see His faithfulness?

BIG IDEA

What is your biggest takeaway from this week's lesson?

Notes