

Bible Study of the Book of Ruth

Introduction: “A widow, an immigrant and a future king.” The Bible Project (2017).

The Book of Ruth illustrates God weaving his plan through the ordinary lives of everyday people. In a difficult and challenging time, the story of Ruth is a narrative of sadness, tears and death, but also a story where blessings, hope and light are found in the dark places too. The book can demonstrate for us the steadfast kindness of God bringing peace, order and the promise of salvation. Out of the 66 books in the Bible, only two are named after women. Ruth is one of the five women listed in Jesus' genealogy and therefore an important person in the Biblical story.

These reasons make the book worthwhile to read and understand. Please read the four chapters before starting and it may be helpful to make notes of anything that feels significant to you, to remember or share.

This Bible study follows a thematic format, highlighting threads from the chapters in chronological order, hopefully applicable in your life today.

The themes are not exhaustive; you may be inspired to follow those of your own. The chosen themes are:

- ***Migration – Faith and Adversity***
- ***Kindness and Blessing***
- ***Motives***
- ***Patriarch and Matriarch***
- ***God's Providence***

Pointers:

Remember the text is the focus; the aim of Bible Study is to explore, examine and reflect on God's Word, to be able to understand it more fully and to be changed by it. Accept the questions that are asked – you may not find the “right” answers or even any answers.

Please join in the activities and discussions if you are comfortable and able; your insights are not just information; to articulate and share them can lead to transformation for yourself and others.

Session 1: Migration - Faith and Adversity

Ponder:

The events are set “In the days when the judges ruled....” (Ruth 1:1), which was probably 1200-1000 BCE. Israel was without a king and it was everyone for himself, (Judges 17:6), which meant chaos and lawlessness. However, during the events described in Ruth, it is a time of relative peace. The characters illustrate their personal faith and their belief in God’s activity, (or providence), in the world. Naomi’s faith is severely tested, but in contrast Ruth demonstrates extraordinary faith.

Opening Prayer: (See Appendix 1)

(the second prayer was chosen and recited by Heather)

Read: Ruth: 1: 1-5

What is the significance of the meanings of the names of Elimelech and his family?

Refer to **Appendix 2**.

The naming of children in those times was not to find a ‘nice’ name as we do today, but to reflect or record circumstances of the birth, or the times and fortunes of the family at that time. Elimelech – My God is King – refers to the fact that Elimelech was of direct lineage to King David, and the family was from Bethlehem in Ephratha, a district of the nascent Israel. The sad names of his sons with Naomi, Mahlon – Sickness; & Kilion – Annihilation; refer to the troubled times in which they were born – the time of the Judges, when there was constant warfare with the Philistines, the Moabites, Amalechites, and just about everybody around – Israel was effectively an intruder into other peoples’ lands!

Why do you think the family left Bethlehem?

There had been famine in Judah, and great hardship, so it became a matter of desperation that they find sustenance elsewhere, even in the hostile land of Moab, which was situated high above the steppelands above the east bank of the Dead Sea.

Why did they decide to go to Moab?

Moab may have been at peace with Judah at this time, and Moab had better land than Judah which was largely desert and hill country. Moab (modern Jordan) had much steppe for grazing sheep & goats, and for some growing of grain. It is recorded, that when Moab was later in fealty to Israel under Ahab, they paid tribute of no less than 100,000 lambs and the wool from 100,000 rams!

Activity: List the costs and benefits of moving to Moab

Whilst benefiting from the bounty of Moab, the family paid dearly as well. Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died there, but her sons each married a Moabite girl –Ruth (Lovely, pleasant) and Orpah (neck), so named perhaps for character (Ruth) and elegance (Orpah). That meant that the women had men to support them, but that changed, with the sudden death of both sons after 10 years in Moab.

Can you think of a time in your life when you had to move away, change jobs or stop / start doing something? Did you need faith?

Mark recounted his and Julia’s experience when having to move from Bristol in 1976 during severe recession and lack of work, and how jobs had wonderfully materialised in Bolton through what can only be God’s leading.

Read: Ruth: 1: 6-18

Why did Naomi decide to return to Bethlehem?

Naomi, having no male support in the family any more, had to go back to her tribe and family for sustenance, for Judah had recovered from famine and was now starting to flourish.

What do Ruth’s words in (1:16-17) reveal about her character, spirituality and purpose in life?

She was loving, faithful, trusting, loyal, seeing herself now as part of Naomi’s family, unlike Orpah, who went back to her own family – perhaps reflecting the names of each – Ruth having a deeper and more allying nature than Orpah, who although beautiful and elegant, lacked the same devotion.

What do Naomi's words in Moab (1: 8-15) and in Bethlehem, (1:20-21) reveal about her character, spirituality and purpose in life?

Naomi, now in middle age, did not want to be responsible for the potential destruction of her daughters-in-law, even though she was now destitute and in need of support and comfort. Despite her urging Ruth and Orpah to find husbands and leave Naomi to her fate, Ruth insisted on staying with her. On return to Judah, Naomi was utterly dejected and bitter for her misfortune, having emptied herself of compassion and love for her daughters. But there was hope, for the Barley Harvest had just begun.

Activity: Who are strong and courageous people in biblical literature, human history or the modern day? Where or how do you see God at work?

Job – Dire loss; Dr Livingstone – Dire situations; Terry Waite – Dire captivity.

Queen Esther; Nicholas Winton (saving Jewish children); Oscar Schindler – saving Jewish families

Going Deeper: Ruth made pledges to Naomi and to God, (1:16-17). Have you made pledges in the past and if so, what? If you were to make a fresh pledge today, what would it be?

Left for private contemplation

Twenty-first Century Relevance: Migration can be a contentious topic. How might Christians provide help and support to those in crisis?

Left for private contemplation

Closing Prayer: Pray for those whose faith shines out to others, for those who have lost faith or have no faith.

Appendix 1

Suggested prayers:

"Our Father in heaven, creator and sustainer of your world, you hold all that you have made within your gracious providence. We thank you for the rich freedom you have given us. Help us in all things to see your hand, and to live as those whose lives are entrusted to your sovereign care. As Ruth from Moab became one of your people, so you call us by name and invite us home. We are glad to find shelter under the refuge of your wings."

Atkinson D. (1983, p.127). *The Message of the Book of Ruth*. BST. Inter-Varsity Press

"Through the Holy Spirit, the giver of life, you lead us into truth. You enrich the guidance of your law through the personal warmth of your generous love..... Your gift of grace is far more abundant than we could ask or think. Teach us to be alert to the needs of others, and to work for a just distribution of the rich bounty of your world, that each may have daily bread for daily need."

Atkinson D. (1983, p.127). *The Message of the Book of Ruth*. BST. Inter-Varsity Press

"God, the Holy Trinity, from you each earthly family receives its name and learns its love. You are the God of history whose purposes span the centuries..... We give you our praise, we ask for your aid and we seek to bring all aspects of our lives under your rule."

Atkinson D. (1983, p.128). *The Message of the Book of Ruth*. BST. Inter-Varsity Press

Appendix 2

Places:

Bethlehem – House of Bread

Judah – Praise

Moab – From father

Names of Characters:

Elimelek – My God is king

Naomi – Lovely / pleasant

Mara – Bitter

Mahlon – Sickness

Chilion – Annihilation

Orpah – Neck

Ruth – Refreshment / comfort

Boaz - In him is strength

Obed – One who serves

Jesse – Gift

David – Beloved

Greene M., (2020, p.31). *Ruth: Drawing on a Deeper Love*. Inter - Varsity Press