



Marc Chagall: "Naomi and her daughters-in-law"

The Book of Ruth

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INTRODUCTION

Is there hope beyond famine, loss of family members and life as displaced people? The Hebrew short story of Ruth says, "YES". Empty people with broken lives can be filled and redeemed by a gracious God.

The widowed Moabitess, Ruth, makes a life-changing promise to her bereft Mother-in-law Naomi. "Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God will be my God." Leaving her homeland and family in Moab, Ruth returns with Naomi to Israel. In the faithful living out of her promise she comes to know the tender mercy of Boaz, a man of great character and kindness. He welcomes her to work in his fields and eventually becomes her husband. It is through this marriage that Ruth, the foreigner, becomes great-grandmother of David and part of Christ's genealogy.

A remarkable account of lament turned to praise, Ruth, challenges God's people today to wider mercy for aliens and strangers, deeper trust in difficult seasons of life, and fresh praise for God's faithfulness throughout generations.

LESSON ONE: RUTH 1:1-4:22

OPENING QUESTION: *How has the location of your birth defined you?*

READ THROUGH THE ENTIRE BOOK OF RUTH.

1. Describe your first impression of the main characters in this book.

Naomi:

Ruth:

Orpah

Boaz

2. What contrasts do you notice in this story?

3. What do you think are the main themes of the book of Ruth?

Note: Moab was located east of the Dead Sea and contained a fertile plain where wheat is still cultivated in today's Jordan.

4. What was Israel's history with Moab?

Genesis 19:30-38

Numbers 25:1-3

Judges 3:12-30

5. Why might Moab have been chosen as the destination for Elimelech and his family?

6. Has God ever taught you something because you left home in a crisis?

Memory Verse: "My soul is weary with sorrow, strengthen me according to your word."
Psalm 119:28

Prayer Guide: Lord, strengthen me according to your word.

LESSON TWO: RUTH 1:1-22

OPENING QUESTION: *Have you ever lived in a place where you felt like a stranger?*

Note: Wide-spread *famines* were not uncommon in the Syro-Palestine era due to lack of rainfall, too much rainfall, insect infestation, plant disease or warfare.

Note: *Bethlehem* means “House of Bread”. Located about five miles south of Jerusalem, it was an area that produced wheat, barley, almonds and grapes.

1. What were the spiritual, moral, and political conditions *in the days when the judges ruled?*

Judges 2:6-19

Judges 21:25

2. Describe the family that left Israel.
3. What issues might face a family in Moab as displaced persons? What issues continue to face such persons in our world today?
4. Read Deuteronomy 7:3-6. How did Elimelech endanger the faith of his family with his move to Moab?
5. What great loss did Naomi suffer?

Note: During this period, widows relied on sons for support. Without a son they might be forced to sell themselves into slavery, resort to prostitution, or die.

6. After ten years in Moab, what led Naomi to return home to Bethlehem?

Why do you think she encouraged her daughters-in-law to return to their mothers after beginning the journey together?

Note: When Ruth promised that death would not separate her from Naomi, she committed to care for Naomi throughout her death and burial. Being cared for in death would have been of great concern for a childless widow.

7. What words of Ruth revealed love and commitment for Naomi? Have you ever said such words or shared such a commitment?

8. What did Ruth risk to stay with Naomi?

9. Why did Naomi want to change her name to Mara?

10. How did Naomi's great loss shape her view of God?

Have there been times in your life when loss shaped your view of God?

11. Read Psalm 22:1-2 What do you learn from the psalm and Naomi about lament in the face of loss?

12. What is God's response to lament and complaint?

13. In the midst of Naomi's grief what signs of hope greeted her on the return to Bethlehem?

14. What hope do these verses provide in times of grief?

Lamentations 3:19-33

Isaiah 40:27-31

Memory Verse: "Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God." *Ruth 1:16b*

Prayer Guide: Lord, make me a faithful servant.

LESSON THREE: RUTH 2:1-23

OPENING QUESTION: *Describe an experience you had working in a field or garden.*

1. How did Ruth provide for Naomi and what did this reveal about her character?

2. What was God's command and promise about gleaning?

Leviticus 19:9-10

Deuteronomy 24:19-22

3. What dangers did Ruth face in the fields?

4. What was Boaz' relationship with the Lord and his workers?

5. How did Boaz welcome and show kindness to Ruth?

6. How did Boaz bless Ruth?

7. Imagine yourself as a field worker. What difference would it make to have the provisions that Boaz offered Ruth?

8. What might have prevented Ruth from establishing a good reputation?

9. Using Ruth as an example, what are some keys to help you establish a good reputation?

10. What do you learn from Boaz to shape your treatment of those who labor in marginalized positions?

11. What encouragement did Naomi receive from Ruth that led her to speak words of blessing instead of bitterness?

12. How has coming through a crisis affected your ability to bless others?

Memory Verse: “May you be richly rewarded by the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge.” *Ruth 2:12b*

Prayer Guide: Lord, help me to find refuge under your wings.

LESSON FOUR: RUTH 3:1-18

OPENING QUESTION: *Have you ever been the object of someone's matchmaking attempts or attempted matchmaking for another?*

Note: Ruth *gleaned* in Boaz's fields for about eight weeks before the barley and wheat harvests were concluded.

Note: An *epah* was half a bushel (about thirty pounds), an unusually generous amount for one day of gleaning.

Note: *Threshing floors* were hard areas on slightly raised platforms. People took turns beating grain out from stalks. The grain was thrown in the air and the wind carried the chaff away.

1. What plan did Naomi put together to assure Ruth and herself a future?
2. Why do you think Ruth was willing to do what Naomi asked?
3. How do the following verses help you determine when to take the initiative about a situation in your future and when to wait on God to do it?

James 1:5

James 4:13-17

Proverbs 3:5-6

Proverbs 16:9

4. How did Ruth put her mother-in-law's plan into action?

What questions or discomfort do her actions cause you?

5. What risks were taken by Ruth as she obeyed Naomi?
Why do you think she was willing to take them?

6. Have you ever taken a great risk and why were you willing to take it?

What were the consequences?

7. How did Ruth go beyond Naomi's directions with her response to Boaz?
What was accomplished through her words and invitation? (v.9)

8. List Boaz's responses to Ruth's night visit.

v.10

vv. 11-13

v. 14

v.15

What did these responses reveal about his character?

9. How does Boaz's example of kindness and generosity motivate you in your service of others?

Memory Verse: "Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience." *Colossians 3:12*

Prayer Guide: Lord, clothe me with kindness.

LESSON FIVE: RUTH 4:1-22

OPENING QUESTION: *Recall a part of your story that started poorly and ended well.*

Note: In ancient times, the *city gate* was the official court where judicial business was transacted in the presence of the elders.

1. What was the kinsman-redeemer's role?

2. What steps were required for Boaz to establish himself as kinsman-redeemer?

What did he risk?

3. What did Boaz reveal of himself as he sat at the town gate?

4. What blessing did the elders and witnesses give to the marriage of Boaz and Ruth?

5. What reversals of emptiness did the women name for Naomi with their words of blessing?

6. Read Ruth 4:18-22 and Matthew 1:2-6. What do these genealogies reveal?

7. How was Obed's birth a joy and delight to his family and a gift to the world during the dark time *when judges ruled*?

8. What hope for God's people lay beyond the darkness?

Isaiah 9:2-7

Luke 2:25-32

Philippians 2:5-11

What hope can you cling to in your darkness?

9. Read Psalm 40:1-5. How might these words reflect the redemptive twist in the stories of Naomi and Ruth? Of you?

Memory Verse: "Many, O LORD, my God, are your wonders you have done." *Psalm 40:5a*

Prayer Guide: Lord, shape my story for Your glory

REVIEW LESSON

1. What verses in this study had a special impact on you?
2. What did you learn from the book of Ruth about
God's work throughout history to accomplish his purposes?

The extent of God's mercy?

God's care for rich and poor?

3. What insight did you gain about
Loss and lament?

Filling emptiness in healthy ways?

4. How did the examples of noble service inspire you to serve?

5. How were you challenged to treat the alien and stranger?

6. What hope does this book provide during difficult chapters of your own story?