

# The Book of Ruth



**“Blessed be the Lord, who has not left you this day without a redeemer, and may his name be renowned in Israel!”**

# Introduction

Hidden in the first half of the Old Testament we find the charming book of Ruth – just four chapter long! It's a love story but with far richer meaning than most. Set in the period of the Judges. In Judges we see the national and political picture of the times - there's much chaos and many are disobeying God by contrast the book of Ruth deals with individuals and we get to see some who are faithful and a God who is provident.

Elimilek, his wife Naomi and their two sons (whose names mean 'weak' and 'sickly') leave Israel during a famine and settle in Moab. They don't however prosper in Moab and all three men die. Naomi decided to go back to her homeland and urges the foreign women her sons have married to stay in their native country.

One of those women, Ruth, refuses to leave Naomi and goes with her to Bethlehem. In the culture these women were vulnerable and poor until they come across Boaz who takes a liking to Ruth and allows her to harvest from his fields.

A relative steps in and agrees to buy the land that ought to be Naomi's families inheritance but once discovering he would need to marry Ruth and the land would belong to any sons they might have he refuses to step up and buy the land. Boaz steps in and buys the land and takes Ruth as his wife.

The story is so much more than a love story and much can be drawn from it, including the themes of:

- Famine and plenty
- Commitment/Covenant
- Returning/spiritual renewal
- In a time when ‘everyone did what was right in his own eyes’, Boaz shines as an example of an honest and honourable person still prepared to follow God’s ways.
- There were debates about racial purity at certain points in Israel’s history and here we find the holy man marrying a foreigner who has accepted God and God bestows great favour upon them as they become the great grandparents of King David and are in the line of Jesus. True love, God’s love, transcends barriers of race, culture and class.
- Redemption – in many ways the love story between Boaz and Ruth is secondary to the greater story of God’s redemption of Naomi – her troubling situation in chapter 1 does a full 180 degree turn by chapter 4. We see God work redemption through Boaz and loving kindness through Ruth. Ruth and Boaz are like God’s hands and feet caring for Naomi. At times we find Naomi bitter and she doesn’t always act faithfully but God watches over her and restores her.

The book of Ruth is carefully structured with four main acts and a prologue and epilogue. Each “act” of Ruth contains elements of God’s covenant love toward his people. Every chapter has a significant phrase in it that

connects to covenant language in other parts of the Old Testament:

- Chapter 1: Ruth clung (same verb as in marriage, Genesis 2:24) to Naomi, showed kindness to her, and says, “Your people shall be my people, and your God my God.” (Ruth 1:8-16)
- Chapter 2: Ruth has “found favour” (v. 13) in Boaz’s eyes. This is language often reserved for a person speaking to God.
- Chapter 3: Ruth says, “Spread your wings over your servant, for you are a redeemer.” (v. 9) This is language that the Israelites use for God’s salvation at the Exodus and in the Psalms.
- Chapter 4: Boaz says he will “redeem” Naomi’s land and “purchase” Ruth as a wife. This is language that the Israelites use for God in how he purchased Israel out of Egypt.



## Ruth 1.1-22 *A Season of Famine*

### WORSHIP SUGGESTION:

The book of Judges deals with the big picture - national upheavals and international issues. By contrast, Ruth focuses in on one man called Elimelek and his family. This highlights to us how a God of the nations is concerned also with the individual. God knows the hairs on our head, notices when we give a cup of cool water and has our names graven on his hands. God cares for us - even the small and ordinary bits of our everyday lives.

It can be common to hear ourselves or others say 'I don't think God is bothered about ...'

Read together Ps 139 as a way of thanking God for caring for us. Then put on some quiet worship music and write out or say some prayers for the ordinary parts of our individual lives with confidence that God cares and hears.

v 2 – Moab: located east of the Jordan River and the Dead Sea.

v 2 – Naomi: means “pleasant, lovely, delightful”.

v 2 – Ephrathites: Ephrath was an earlier name for Bethlehem.

v 8 – LORD: personal name of God meaning “I am who I am” ([Exodus 3:14](#)); The God who is actively present with his people.

v 8 – kindness: The Hebrew term “hesed” means loyal love based upon faithfulness and commitment.

v 11 – sons who could become your husbands: The Old Testament Law stated that if a man died, his brother had to marry the widow to protect her and carry on the family name. Naomi’s comment here (“sons who could grow up to be your husbands”) refers to levirate marriage, the obligation of a dead man’s brother to care for the widow ([Deuteronomy 25:5-10](#)). This law kept the widow from poverty and provided a way for the family name of the dead husband to continue.

v 20 – Mara: bitter, sad.

v 20 – Almighty: “The Mountain One” suggesting unlimited power.

v 22 – Bethlehem: “house of bread”; located about five miles southwest of Jerusalem. The town was surrounded by lush fields and olive groves. Its harvests were abundant.

## ICEBREAKER

Anthony Ray Hinton was on death row for 28 years - wrongly accused of murder. You can look up an article from the guardian on him which has this in it:

“Since his release, he has travelled in the US and abroad, speaking about the injustice he endured, and how religious faith, his mother, and friendship helped him survive.” The religious faith the article weakly refers to is - the impact of how faith in Jesus transformed his ability to cope in a very hard ‘famine’ like experience. You can see more of that on you tube videos. What other examples do you know of faith helping people through really difficult seasons and circumstances in life?

## WORD

Read Ruth 1.1-22

Read Judges 21.25 - what is the spiritual state of Israel at this time?

Why was Naomi in Moab? What condition is she in after 10 years of being there? What was much harder for widows in that culture than in the UK today?

Do you think Elimelech made a mistake in moving his family to Moab? Why did Elimelech move & in what ways has the exact opposite of his intentions occurred?

*We don't know but the famine in Bethlehem may have been caused by the chaotic time of the judges and the Midianites invading and destroying the land and cattle. So Elimelech decided to temporarily go to Moab to avoid famine. However other Bethlehemites stayed*

*and saw the famine through - ironically they fared better than Elimelech. And Naomi was left in a position of even greater isolation than she would have had she been in her home community. Moab was a particularly strange choice of place for them to move - for the people there did not worship Yahweh - they made human sacrifices. Why did they not go to a different place? Did they not trust God's providence - instead were they looking to the 'world' and hoping for their needs to be met there? Did Naomi's community treat her badly on her return as they'd felt she'd abandoned them in going to Moab?*

In seasons of famine (spiritual and literal) we can be quick to see God's displeasure and wonder if it is punishment. We can be quick to look for a quick fix rather than go through the season - perhaps looking to the world rather than to God to help us through. I wonder if you've ever felt empty and downcast like Naomi did? With that in mind:

- How do you discern how to respond and act in season of 'famine'?
- How can suffering affect our relationship with God?
- When might God be teaching us through suffering and when is suffering just the unfortunate horrific consequence of living in this fallen world - and when can it be both? Why do we need to be so careful in how we respond to suffering others face? Can you remember some of the lessons we learnt from Job?
- How should we respond to God in seasons of 'famine'?
- How can we encourage one another not to look to the 'world' for help but to God?

*A useful resource to continue thinking around this is a book by Timothy Keller called 'Walking With God Through Pain and Suffering'*

What do we learn about Naomi in verse 6-7? How can you keep in the front of your mind what God has done in the past and stay alert to what he might be doing in the present?

*It's interesting that Naomi has kept communication lines with home open - she must have remembered how God had helped his people in the past and was waiting for what he might do in the present. The bible tells us so very often: 'remember' in fact my tutor in college once told me this was the most frequent command of the bible. Remembering who God is and what God has done can be a great help in difficult times as it strengthens our faith. So Naomi is able to leave her unanswered difficulties, anger and hurt in God's hands and set off with confidence in God's providence and blessing.*

What do you think Ruth and Orpah witnessed in Naomi's prayer for them (verses 8-9)?

What reasons does Naomi give to her daughter-in-laws for not remaining with her?

Why did Ruth decide to risk so much and stick with Naomi? If you were Ruth would you have stayed with her?

What does Naomi change her name to and why? (verses 19-22)

How often does the word or theme 'return/returning' occur in this chapter - how does it shape what is going on?

Even though Naomi blames God for her suffering in what ways is God showing her kindness? (verses 15-18)



**What are some of the things we learn about God and about God's people from this passage?**

**WITNESS SUGGESTIONS:**

- 1. God uses Ruth to show his love and kindness to Naomi is there someone you know suffering a physical or spiritual famine at the moment - that you could encourage or stand alongside in some way this week.**
- 2. Who might be the 'Ruth's' in our lives - who can we actively share what difference God makes to us as we live in this world. For some of us we may want to take up a fresh commitment to pray for those closest to us who do not yet know God's love for them. Why not write their names on a little bit of paper and stick it in your sock drawer to remind you to pray each day.**
- 3. What might you do to strengthen your own faith?**



## Ruth 2.1-23 *A Season of Change*

### WORSHIP SUGGESTION:

Put on from you tube: “JASON UPTON - Live Worship Set (incredibly powerful and anointed!)”. The first few minutes are a song with the words ‘this is our home’ - it’s a call to be a people who reside with God. That wherever we are and whatever we face our true home is with God. Why not rest for a moment and invite God to bless you with His presence and worship him in your hearts and minds.

### ICEBREAKER:

You might want to watch (although might be a little long - so could ask group to watch before they come) ‘You Tube: Who Moved My Cheese The Movie’ and have a discussion around how we deal and cope with change. Often all the characters in this are represented in us and can come out of us on different circumstances. OR have a brief discussion into the ways we can react to ‘change’.

### OR

Have you ever received the kindness of a stranger? What was it like?

### WORD:

Read Ruth 2

*At the end of chapter 1 we find Naomi and Ruth have made huge changes in coming to Bethlehem just as the barely harvest was beginning. Naomi who had initiated the return to Bethlehem now seems unsure of the next move and it’s Ruth who takes the initiative in helping them survive by suggesting she goes to work in the fields.*

*Just as God provided for Ruth and Naomi through one man's obedience to his commands, God still provides for the world through the obedience and faith of his people. In this story, Boaz is a picture of God's love and provision for his people. As you study this passage, celebrate God's provision for everything you need for life and godliness according to the knowledge of Jesus Christ and ask for the grace to trust God especially in seasons of change.*

List all the ways that you can see God's providence and provision in this chapter.

In verse 1 Boaz is described as 'worthy' in what ways do you see evidence of this in the passage?

Having made and acted upon her decision to move Naomi seems now unable to make any more decisions. Why do you think Ruth steps in? In what ways does Ruth do so humbly? Why is it easier to face changes with other rather than on our own?

God's law required that Boaz provide for the poor during harvest. In what ways does he go beyond this basic provision for Ruth and seek to honour God in doing so?

In what areas of your life do you fully seek to honour God and in what areas do you still hold back - perhaps doing the bare minimum?

Why is Naomi so excited to hear about Boaz in verse 20?

God uses Boaz to provide. Where do you struggle to trust God's provision for you - perhaps physical, emotional or spiritual? What are some of your current needs and what

might God be teaching you about faith as you choose to trust him to provide for you?

### **WITNESS SUGGESTIONS:**

1. Is there something you could do to welcome the foreigners in our land. Perhaps look up the work of lcf, tear fund or other groups working for justice & support for those marginalised.
2. Pray for opportunities to show Gods love to those going through a period of change.
3. Where could you go beyond the bare minimum and honour God more fully - acknowledging that all you have - all of it ultimately comes form him?



## Ruth 3.1-18 *A Season of Hope*

WORSHIP SUGGESTION: (consider using a set prayer,  
L = leader and A = all)

L: The Lord Almighty grant us a quiet night and a perfect end.

*A: Amen*

L: Our help is in the name of the Lord

*A: who made heaven and earth.*

Silence is kept.

*A: Most merciful God, we confess to you, before the whole company of heaven and one another, that we have sinned in thought, word and deed and in what we have failed to do. Forgive us our sins, heal us by your Spirit and raise us to new life in Christ. Amen*

*A: O Lord, make haste to help us.*

*A: Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit; as it was in the beginning is now and shall be for ever. Amen*

L: Before the ending of the day, Creator of the world, we pray, That you, with steadfast love, would keep Your watch around us while we sleep. From evil dreams defend our sight, From fears and terrors of the night; tread underfoot our deadly foe that we no sinful thought may know. O Father, that we ask be done through Jesus Christ, your only Son; And Holy Spirit, by whose breath Our souls are raised to life from death.

WORD: (you could do the bible study here or just ask someone to read out the passage from Ruth that you'll be studying!)

L: Read Psalm 4

L: Into your hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit.

*A: Into your hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit.*

L: For you have redeemed me, Lord God of truth.

*A: I commend my spirit.*

*A: Glory to the Father and to the Son  
and to the Holy Spirit.*

*A: Into your hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit.*

*A: Save us, O Lord, while waking, and guard us while  
sleeping, that awake we may watch with Christ and  
asleep may rest in peace.*

L: 1 Now, Lord, you let your servant go in peace: ♦  
your word has been fulfilled.

2 My own eyes have seen the salvation ♦

which you have prepared in the sight of every people;

3 A light to reveal you to the nations ♦

and the glory of your people Israel.

*A: Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy  
Spirit; as it was in the beginning is now and shall be for  
ever. Amen.*

*A: Save us, O Lord, while waking, and guard us while  
sleeping, that awake we may watch with Christ and  
asleep may rest in peace.*

*A: OFFER INTERCESSIONS*

Silence may be kept.

L: Visit this place, O Lord, we pray, and drive far from it  
the snares of the enemy; may your holy angels dwell with  
us and guard us in peace, and may your blessing be  
always upon us; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

*A: Amen.*

The Lord's Prayer (here) may be said.

L: In peace we will lie down and sleep;

*A: for you alone, Lord, make us dwell in safety.*

L: Abide with us, Lord Jesus,

*A: for the night is at hand and the day is now past.*

L: As the night watch looks for the morning,

*A: so do we look for you, O Christ.*

L: The Lord bless us and watch over us; the Lord make his face shine upon us and be gracious to us; the Lord look kindly on us and give us peace.

*A: Amen.*

### ICE BREAKER:

Have you ever helped anyone out of a tricky situation or has someone help you out of one?

OR What signs of hope can you see in our world today?

(for example: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/world-middle-east-43744747/mosul-woman-risks-backlash-to-care-for-is-orphans>)

### WORD:

Read Ruth 3

*It's easy to forget reading Ruth that this really was a very dark time for Israel. "It seems like the line of Christ could never come through such vicious and depraved people who are breaking God's covenant. Yet Ruth's story gives us the glimmer of hope that God is still among covenant-keeping people, even in the worst of times. The Bible has one overarching story that unfolds in four acts: Creation, Fall, Rescue, and Redemption. The book of Ruth is located after the Fall but before the Rescue. While Boaz fore- shadows the coming Rescuer, the ultimate Rescuer (Jesus) has not yet arrived. Ruth is living through a painfully clear outworking of the Fall — death that was never supposed to happen has taken her husband, food that was never supposed to be in short supply was gone, and belonging to a*

*warm family was a distant dream. Ruth 3 has both an immediate and future objective: to reveal God's little plan that will undo Naomi and Ruth's present suffering through Boaz and to foreshadow God's big plan that will undo the whole world's suffering in the future through Jesus." (Taken from Summit Church)*

What 'hope' is born in this chapter and what will it mean for each of the different characters?

What is surprising about the story?

Which character can you relate to the most and who do you relate to the least and why? In what ways was Ruth in particular brave and obedient?

*There is a debate as to whether Naomi might have intended Ruth to be even more pushy/flirtatious and perhaps even to act unhonorably however Ruth and Boaz do act with honour. Looking at the passage can you see how this debate has arisen?*

*Boaz is impressed with Ruth not going after younger men but showing loyalty to Naomi and seeking his guardianship. Knowing the guardian-redeemer laws why did Boaz wait for Ruth to come to him?*

Looking at verse 3-4 - we see that lying at feet is a posture of servanthood. Ruth could demand Boaz's protection under the law and yet she comes to him humbly. What do we see in their characters from this interaction?

Boaz agrees to be the guardian-redeemer but he wants to make it legal and doesn't want to step over someone else. So often we, in our desire to get something done,



we can step over someone else in the process. What can we learn from Boaz here?

Sometimes we wonder how much we should do to make things happen and how much we should leave to God. How does Ruth 3 help us with that? How can we apply Ruth 3 to making plans?

In what areas of our lives do we need to act in obedience and where might we need to wait trusting in God?

#### **WITNESS SUGGESTIONS:**

1. Pray for an opportunity to share your hope in Jesus this week.
2. Is there something you could do this summer to serve the discipleship of others. Could you offer to help Kim Parkash at the holiday club for children - maybe you could bake some biscuits. Could you support Zoe Philips in praying for the young people she'll take to Soul Survivor. If you're attending a summer festival or camp is there something you could do to bless someone else there so that they might be freer to receive from God. Is there someone in the church family you could invite around for a meal or a coffee out to just bless them with your time and friendship.



## **Ruth 4 *A Season of New Beginnings***

### **WORSHIP SUGGESTION:**

At the end of this booklet you'll see a table of how God is at work in Ruth - this comes from some notes from Summit Church and shows Christ in the Book of Ruth. Take sometime to marvel God's work in his people and use it to spur on your praise.

### **ICEBREAKER:**

Naomi's situation has changed a full 180 degrees. Has that ever happened to you? Where can you see that in history? What new things are happening around you in this season?

### **WORD:**

Read Ruth 4

Looking at verse 1-6 why doesn't the other redeemer want to fulfil his duty? In what ways is Boaz acting in contrast to him?

Looking at verse 11-12 what is being said and why is it important?

How did God redeem Ruth? Why might it have surprised people that God cared so much for Ruth?

Why did Ruth and Boaz's marriage bless Naomi? In what ways today in our society should marriages bless more than just the husband and wife?

Have you seen God pull people out of bitterness and sadness? How does this happen for Naomi?

What in your life may need to change or be developed so that God could use your character for good in the community?

Why is the genealogy a fitting way to end the story?

How is God's faithfulness shown in the story?

As we finish our study in Ruth what one encouragement and what one challenge are you going to take with you?

#### **WITNESS SUGGESTION:**

1. Pray for a few people specifically to experience the new beginning of becoming a disciple. If you're a parent specifically pray for your children and think about ways you might share more of Jesus with them over the summer break - is there something you could use from the resource booklet aimed at families - you can pick up a copy in church.

*Some inspiration and ideas have been taken from Summit Church. The Message of Ruth by David Atkinson and Judges & Ruth Commentary by Mary J. Evans*