

YOBL

Year of Biblical Literacy

Week 12:

Daily Reading for Week

- Judges 19-21, Psalm 76
- Ruth 1-4, Psalm 77
- 1 Samuel 1-3, Psalm 78
- 1 Samuel 4-8, Psalm 79
- 1 Samuel 9-12, Psalm 80
- 1 Samuel 13-14, Psalm 81
- 1 Samuel 15-17, Psalm 82
- Videos: Ruth, 1 Samuel

Focus of time together

This week we are going to focus our time together on the book of Ruth.

Opening Prayer

Heavenly Father, as I consider the wonderful way you took the shattered lives of Naomi and Ruth, who were left widowed and alone in a pagan land, yet turned everything around for good, I am amazed and humbled at your kindness and grace, your power and sovereign authority. I pray that I will not stray from the path of peace, not rely on my own abilities, but trust you in all things. Help me to live my life in active dependence on you alone. Use my life, I pray, to forward your plans and purposes in whatever way you choose, and may I live each day to your honour. This I ask in Jesus' name, Amen.

Intro to Discussion

In this story we read about a young moabite widow who, out of love for her widowed Israelite mother-in-law, abandoned her own culture, declaring “Your people shall be my people, and your God my God” (1:16). Though she was destitute and needing to rely on the kindness of others, Ruth’s disposition and character captured the attention of Boaz, a close relative of her deceased husband. Boaz fulfilled the role of kinsman-redeemer and took Ruth as his wife. Ruth serves as a wonderful example of God providential care of his people, and of his willingness to accept Gentiles who seek him.

Whole Group Discussion (40 minutes)

Let’s look at chapter 1. Describe Naomi’s condition after being in Moab for 10 years? Can the choices we make influence how our life will turn out? What choices did Naomi and her husband make? How did their decisions influence their situation?

In the middle of her situation Ruth responds to Naomi in verse 16, “But Ruth replied, “Don’t urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God.” What stands out to you about Ruth’s statement?

As the story develops in chapter 2, do you see God actively at work, or do you see the events unfold by chance or mere coincidence? Why?

Who was Boaz’s mother? Google it. How did Boaz’s family get connected with the Israelites? (You can read the story in Joshua chapters 2-6.) How do you think Boaz’s background influenced the way he treated Ruth? Can you see God at work in this?

Reread 3:3-4. To lie down at someone’s feet would be to take the position of a servant, waiting for the command of the master (something Ruth references later). Ruth waits for Boaz to tell her what to do. She could demand his protection under the law, but instead comes in a posture of humility and servanthood. What do you learn about the character of Boaz and Ruth from this interaction?

The only direct reference to God (the Lord) in the book of Ruth is in 3:10, when Boaz blesses Ruth. Do you see the actions that happen in this chapter as an example of God at work or of people taking matters into their own hands? Why?

Think back to chapter one and reflect on some of the words Naomi used to describe her life. How did she describe God’s work in her life in chapter one? Read Ruth 4:14-17. How do you think she would describe her life in chapter four?

Compare her life in chapter four to her description in chapter one. Take a moment to examine how God works. How did he work in Naomi’s life? How does he work in your life?

As you read the book of Ruth it unfolds like a beautiful love story and God’s provision for two ladies in need. Read 4:17-22. These verses hint at a larger and more grand story that is developing. David, the giant killer and future king is mentioned as a descendent of Ruth. How did Ruth’s personal story have an effect on the future of the nation of Israel? Have you ever thought about how your life can have an impact on the generations to come? If you believed that, how would it change how you are living today?

Small Group Discussion (25 minutes)

Questions for Examining Ourselves

These questions are to help us look at ourselves, be aware and honest about who we are in light of our interaction with Scripture and consider any appropriate action.

Sometimes the circumstances we face make us feel like things are stacked up against us. Sometimes we are tempted to think that even God is against us. Can you relate? If you are comfortable sharing, describe a situation from your life when you felt like that.

Do you believe that God has a plan for your life? Do you believe it is a good plan? Really? Can you give examples of why you believe this?

How is Naomi mentoring Ruth? In Matthew 28, Jesus tells his disciples to “...go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” What is your role when it comes to mentoring others?

Can you identify someone in your life whom you could influence or mentor? As a group discuss how you can each be a better mentor to the one or two individuals God has given you the opportunity to influence.

Ruth took a risk. She took a step of faith to do what she felt like God is leading her to do. Where do you feel God is calling you to take a risk and step out in faith?

Closing Prayer (15 minutes)

Ask God to reveal something from the passage to you that you can take into prayer. Is there anything that the study has raised that you would like to pray about together?

Heavenly Father, what a comfort to know that you are our never-failing help in times of trouble. Thank you for the book of Ruth and the many lessons it teaches us. We pray that we may remain in the centre of your perfect will for our lives, but that when we go astray, we would quickly call to you in the time of trouble. Thank you that nothing in life is so terrible that you do not have an answer and we pray that our faith would continue to grow and mature. This we ask in Jesus' name, Amen.

Some notes to help look at this passage:

Additional Notes for Chapter One

- verse 2 – Moab: located east of the Jordan River and the Dead Sea.
- verse 2 – Naomi: means “pleasant, lovely, delightful”.
- verse 2 – Ephrathites: Ephrath was an earlier name for Bethlehem.
- verse 8 – LORD: personal name of God meaning “I am who I am” (Exodus 3:14); The God who is actively present with his people.
- verse 8 – kindness: The Hebrew term “hesed” means loyal love based upon faithfulness and commitment.
- verse 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.
- verse 20 – Mara: bitter, sad.
- verse 20 – Almighty: “The Mountain One” suggesting unlimited power.
- verse 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. The population of the town would not have exceeded a couple of hundred in most periods and was likely considerably less at this time.

Additional Notes for Chapter Two

- Gather leftover grain (verse 2). When the wheat and barley were ready to be harvested, harvesters were hired to cut down the stalks and tie them into bundles. Israelite law demanded that the corners of the fields not be harvested. In addition, any grain that was dropped was to be left for poor people, who picked it up (this was called gleaning) and used it for food (Leviticus 19:9; 23:22; Deuteronomy 24:19). This law served as a type of welfare program in Israel.
- I have told the men not to touch you (verse 9). The ideal position for a gleaner was right behind the harvesters, where one would be the first to pick up whatever stalks fell from the sheaves. However, a gleaner who followed too closely was vulnerable to rough treatment by the workmen.
- Half a bushel (verse 7). Between thirty and fifty pounds of grain; about a month’s worth of the grain ration usually allotted to male workers.
- Family-Redeemer (verse 20). Responsible for protecting the interests of needy members of the extended family.
- NOTE: The author continually reminds us that Ruth was from Moab. Israel regarded Moab as an inferior people, descended from an incestuous union (Genesis 19:30-38). Moab had been hostile towards Israel since the days of Moses. Moab also oppressed some of the Israelite tribes for eighteen years toward the beginning of the judges’ era (Judges 3:12-30).

Additional Notes for Chapter Three

- Winnowing...on the threshing floor (verse 2). Farmers separate the useful seeds of grain from the useless stalks by laying the grain on the floor and having animals walk on it. Once the seeds are loosened, they toss it in the air and the wind separates it the rest of the way.
- Guardian-redeemer/Kinsman-redeemer (verse 9). The Kinsman-redeemer was a man legally obligated to take care of the childless widow of a member of his family. He is the nearest relation to the dead man and is required to marry the widow in order to continue

the dead man's name and family line. (You can read more about it in Deuteronomy 25:5-10)

- Six measures of barley (verse 15). It is unclear how much this is, but shows that Boaz is continuing to provide for Ruth and Naomi.

Additional Notes for Chapter Four

- Town gate (verse 1). This was the centre of activity. No one could enter or leave the town without traveling through the gate. Merchants set up their temporary shops near the gate, which also served as city hall. Here city officials gathered to conduct business.
- Leaders (verse 4). Usually clan leaders or the heads of households served as the governing body of the city. Judicial and legal matters were in their hands.
- Like Rachel and Leah (verse 11). Their sons became the initial fathers of Israel's twelve tribes.
- Perez (verse 12). He was the father of the most famous tribe in Judah, the one to which Boaz belonged.
- Seven sons (verse 15). Since seven was considered a number of completeness, to have seven sons was considered to be the highest level of all family blessings in Israel.