

Ruth 1

Adversity's Exile and Return to the Promised Land

The Book of Ruth is essentially a character study of three people—Naomi, Ruth and Boaz—and how they interacted with each other, the people around them, and with God.

What do we know about Ruth's nationality/spirituality? She was a Moabitess—a Gentile.

Who were the Moabites? Descendants of the incestuous relationship between Lot and his oldest daughter (Genesis 19).

What is especially noteworthy about Ruth's ancestral lineage? She is one of five women included in the genealogy of Christ. **Who are the other four?** Tamar, Rahab, Bathsheba, Mary (Matthew 1).

One of the main purposes of the Old Testament genealogies was to ensure the religious and cultural purity of the Jewish nation. The genealogies traced Israelite descendants through tribal and family heads and were normally very patriarchal. However, Ruth was both a woman and a Gentile. **What does that tell us about God?**

What one-word theme describes the Book of Ruth? Redemption. Boaz is referred to as a kinsman-redeemer. He is a type of Christ, with several parallels between him and Christ who are both kinsmen and redeemers.

In the days when the judges ruled... (v. 1). What kind of days were those for Israel? They were characterized as a period where: *Everyone did what was right in his own eyes (Judges 21:25.)* These were dark days of national disunity, apostasy, immorality and oppression. This period occurred between 1350-1050 BC, between the days of Joshua and Saul. **Who were some noteworthy judges?** Gideon, Deborah, Samson.

What is often the biblical significance of a famine (v. 1)? A sign of God's judgment—not surprising for those dark days.

It's easy to second-guess the decision of Elimelech, Naomi's husband, to go to Moab. It was a common-sense decision and apparently not a faith-based decision as there is no indication that God was ever consulted. Much like Abraham's decision to go to Egypt in the face of a famine. **Should these two men have remained in the Promised Land and waited on God to provide?**

Tragedy struck Naomi while in Moab. She lost her husband and two sons. In the ancient world, to be a childless widow put you in the lowest and most disadvantaged class of humanity. There was no one to support you and you had to live on the generosity of strangers. All that was left of Naomi's family were two Moabite daughters-in-law.

Naomi's name means "pleasant." How would you describe Naomi in Chapter 1? Naomi saw herself as a victim. She was a model of self-pity and bitterness.

Who did she blame for her plight in life (vv. 13, 20-21)? God.

Was she correct in assigning blame to God? Based on the sovereignty of God—yes. But God was not punishing Naomi; her experience was designed as a time of testing and perhaps discipline.

What made Naomi decide to return to Israel (v. 6)? The famine had ended. The Lord had provided food.

How would you describe Naomi's relationship with her daughters-in-law (v. 9, 14)? As evidenced by their displays of emotion toward one another, Naomi had a real relationship of love with them; she kissed them; they wept aloud. Naomi loved her daughters-in-law; she wanted the very best for them, and thought it best for them each to return their own mothers.

Would returning to their people be the best solution for Orpah and Ruth? Common sense makes it seem that staying in Moab instead of going to the new land of Israel with Naomi would be the wise thing to do. Orpah and Ruth had stronger family ties in Moab than they did with Naomi. There were no language barriers. It would be easier to find a spouse.

But no, this was not the best solution for Orpah and Ruth. Naomi should have encouraged them to leave their pagan land and come to Israel where they would have been able to worship and come to know the one true God.

How did Ruth respond (v. 16)? Ruth clung to her and said, *Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people.* This was a noble friend-to-friend commitment.

But Ruth's commitment to Naomi went even further when she said what? *And your God [will be] my God.* This move to Bethlehem was much more than a change of address for Ruth. She was willing to forsake the Moabite gods she had spent her entire life worshipping and embrace the God of Israel.

What made Ruth decide to accept the God of Israel? How can you explain her willingness to abandon her gods? Naomi's (and perhaps Elimelech's) witness. And perhaps disenchantment with her false religion.

Naomi's relationship with the God of Israel had made an impact on Ruth. This is striking because Naomi had been widowed and had lost both her sons – her life was not easy. But despite her pain, Naomi had a strong witness in the face of adversity. She didn't desert or abandon God. She still honored and loved Him. Ruth saw something in Naomi that made her want to follow after Naomi's God.

What does Ruth's choice to leave Moab tell us about her? How would you describe her? Selfless, devoted, loyal, willing to sacrifice, willing to take a risk and leave everything familiar. She was willing to go to an unknown place and people and God, and faced potential ridicule from both her Moabite people for leaving as well as from the Jews for being both an outsider and a Gentile.

Application:

People should be able to look at our life, just as Ruth looked at Naomi's, and say, "I want your God to be my God." Our trust in God, and turning toward Him in tough times will often be the thing that draws others to the LORD.

How do we react in the face of adversity?

Do you know anybody who is hurting like Naomi? Somebody you can be a Ruth to? Maybe someone who has lost a spouse or child? Someone with deep hurts that you can be a friend to? Someone you can come alongside and support and encourage?

Ruth stepped outside her comfort zone, trusted in God and went – she was a risk taker for God. It would have been easy to stay in Moab with friends, family, everything familiar. **Are we locked into our comfort zones?**

During the "famines of life" our faith is tempered and our relationship with God grows deeper. Trials are designed by God with a purpose (James 1:2-3, Romans 5:3), and can make us better (draw close to God) or bitter (angry with God). The question is how are we going to handle them? Are we going to avoid difficult times? Look for a way out of the trial like Elimelech did rather than pray our way through it? Elimelech, Ruth and Naomi are models for us from both a positive and negative perspective. **What can we learn from the way they handled their trials?**

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