

# A Five Week Bible Study of Ruth

## Return From Exile



Bill Peacock



Ruth Study – Lesson 1  
Ruth 1:1-5

Day 1: Read Ruth 1:1-5.

1. What is the historical setting for the book of Ruth provided in v. 1? What do we know about the condition of Israel, and the causes of its condition?
2. What does the repeated cycle, or downward spiral, of Judges teach us about the consequences of our decisions?
3. How does v. 1, by placing the story in the context of Judges, provide a theological setting by which we can judge the actions described in the verse?

Day 2: Read Ruth 1:1-5.

4. Though Bethlehem means “House of Bread,” there was little bread there at this time—either physical or spiritual. Given the historical context, what may have been the reasons for this?
5. What choices was Elimelech making, both physical and spiritual, when deciding between Bethlehem and Moab? Did he make the right or wrong choices by moving? How do we know? See Genesis 19:30-38; Number 22-24; Numbers 25; and Judges 3.

Day 3: Read Ruth 1:1-5.

6. How did Elimelech’s family fall further into sin after his death? See Numbers 25 and 2 Corinthians 6:14-18.

7. How might have the decisions made by Naomi and her sons been in part the consequences of the previous decisions made by her and her husband? See Romans 1:24-32.

Day 4: Read Ruth 1:1-5, Acts 5:1-11, and 1 John 2:19.

8. How do we see God at work in the lives of Elimelech and his family once they depart from Israel?

9. How can God's work in the lives of the unrepentant bring fear and terror? But how might it also, as in the case of Naomi, bring hope, comfort, and eventually repentance?

Day 5: Read Ruth 1:1-5, Psalm 113:7-8, Luke 15:11-32, and Titus 2:11-14.

10. How are you, like Elimelech and Naomi, lacking trust in God's goodness and provision?

11. When you face the consequences of your sin, how can you find comfort? How has God left the door open for your return? Where does the path to returning begin?

12. Where in God, His works, and His promises do you find hope?

## Ruth Study – Lesson 2

### Ruth 1:6-22

Day 1: Read Ruth 1:6-22 and Deuteronomy 28.

1. The Bible is a story of Exile and Exodus; mankind is exiled from the garden/promised land, then are later led out of exile and back into God's presence through the death of Christ on the cross. But there are other micro-examples of this pattern in the Bible, especially in relationship to the Promised Land. List at least two of these where God's people leave the land but later return.
2. How is the exile/exodus pattern related to the covenant? See Deuteronomy 28.
3. In the exile/exodus pattern, what is the condition of God's people, spiritually or materially, when they leave the land? When they return? List some examples.

Day 2: Read Ruth 1:1-22.

4. Because they were hungry, Elimelech, Naomi, and their sons left Bethlehem, the 'House of Bread,' the Promised Land, and the home of the God that had provided Israel bread in the desert to reside in Moab, a land that had rejected the Israelites and God. How might their actions been seen as rejecting God's covenant with His people? What are the consequences of their rejection? In light of this covenant rejection, might their departure from the land be seen as an exile?
5. In v. 21, Naomi claims "I went away full, and the LORD has brought me back empty." What is she referring to? How is this different than the usual situation in the pattern of exile/exodus?
6. What in the story might lead us to think that Naomi is wrong about being full when she left and empty upon her return?

Day 3: Read Ruth 1:6-22.

7. Naomi encouraged both Orpah and Ruth to stay behind in Moab where they might find “rest.” Where was the only place they could find true rest? Why would Naomi try to send them away from true rest?
  
8. When she returns to Israel, what is Naomi’s spiritual condition as seen in vv. 19-21? Do you think she had been living in rebellion/disobedience against Yahweh the entire time she had been away? Explain.

Day 4: Read Ruth 1:6-22 and Genesis 2:18-24.

9. Whatever the state of her relationship with Yaweh, Naomi wasn’t willing to “evangelize” Orpah and Ruth. What did she tell them to try to convince them to stay in Moab? How might Orpah’s response been the more rational of the two?

10. Ruth is said to “cling” to Naomi in v. 14. This is the same Hebrew word used in Genesis 2:24 when it says a man will “hold fast” to his wife. What are the covenant implications of her clinging to Naomi like a man to his wife?

Day 5: Read Ruth 1:6-22 and Genesis 13:14-18.

11. What are some of the covenant implications and/or hints of faith from Ruth’s speech in vv. 16-17?

12. In v. 22, Ruth is said to have returned to Israel from the country of Moab. Since she had never been in Israel before, how could she be returning there? Might she have been converted and therefore was “returning” to her spiritual home? Explain your answer.

13. How is living in Israel in the Old Testament similar to membership in the church today? What are the risks to professing Christians who fail to refuse to join and attend church?

## Ruth Study – Lesson 3

### Ruth 2:1 – 2:23

Day 1: Read Ruth 2:1-9.

1. Review Ruth 1. What does Naomi think of the position she and Ruth find themselves in at the open of Ruth 2? What hints are there at the end of Ruth 1 and the beginning of Ruth 2 that their situation is better than Naomi thinks it is?
2. Have you ever found yourself in a situation similar to that of Naomi and Ruth? In a tough situation like that, who are you more like, Naomi or Ruth? What can you do to become more like Ruth? See Matthew 6:25-34.
3. Some would say that Ruth displays the “faith of Abraham” by returning to Israel with Naomi. What might they mean by that? How does she display that faith in the reading for today? How does this compare to Naomi?
4. While Naomi’s despair may display a lack of faith, she and Ruth are in a difficult and potentially dangerous situation. What are their needs? What are the dangers? How in this passage has God protected and made provision for Ruth and Naomi and justified Ruth’s faith? See Leviticus 19:9-10 and Deuteronomy 24:19-22.

Day 2: Read Ruth 2:4-18.

5. List all the information in this passage about Boaz. What do you learn about what kind of man he is?
6. Do you and your church welcome foreigners and the poor like Boaz did? What steps can you take to do so?

Day 3: Read Ruth 2:19-23.

7. What is Naomi's response when Ruth comes home? Is there a hint of rejuvenated faith in her? What was it that began to change her heart?
  
8. In v. 22, Naomi tells Ruth, "It is good, my daughter, that you go out with his young women, lest in another field you be assaulted." How does this common sense advice stand in contrast to the actions of Elimelech and Naomi at the beginning of the Ruth?

Day 4: Read Ruth 2:19-23.

9. How does Naomi refer to Boaz in v. 20b? What does this mean? See Leviticus 25:25-55 and Deuteronomy 25:5-10.
  
10. By the end of Ruth 2, what needs of Naomi and Ruth have been met? What particular need does Ruth still have (see v. 23b)? What is the one great need they both have that points them to a Redeemer beyond Boaz?

Day 5: Read Ruth 2:19-23.

11. Ruth and Naomi arrived home at the time of Passover. Now, in v. 23 at the end of the harvest, it is the time of the festival of first fruits, part of the feast of weeks (see Leviticus 23:15ff), i.e., Pentecost. How is Ruth's inclusion in Israel a foreshadowing of what was to come at Pentecost (Acts 2) and in our lives as well?
  
12. Paul writes, "God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus." Read Isaiah 55:1-13. While often our thoughts may be focused on simply gleaning from the edge of the field, God has something greater in mind for us. Describe what you learn about this in Isaiah 55.
  
13. In times when your heart is hard or bitter, how can you, like Naomi, begin to turn away from this?



Ruth Study – Lesson 4  
Ruth 3

Day 1: Read Ruth 3, Numbers 25:1-5, and Deuteronomy 25:5-10.

1. Compare Ruth 3:1-2 with Ruth 1:8-9. How are they similar? How are they different?
2. In v. 1-2, does Naomi appear to have had a change in heart since chapter 1? Why or why not?
3. In trying to get a husband for Ruth in vv. 1-4, is Naomi's plan a faithful legal appeal based on biblical law or desperate indecent proposal based on Ruth's Moabite heritage? Explain.

Day 2: Read Ruth 3:5-13, Genesis 38, Ezekiel 16:8, Malachi 4:2, and Matthew 1:1-6.

4. How are the stories of Tamar and Ruth similar? What is their importance in redemptive history?
5. What are the risks that Tamar and Ruth took in these stories?
6. What is Ruth asking Boaz when she says, "Spread your wings over your servant, for you are a redeemer?"
7. Were Tamar's and Ruth's motives in taking these risks honorable? How are they judged in Scripture?

Day 3: Read Ruth 3:8-13.

8. Boaz was a kinsman redeemer who points us to the ultimate Kinsman Redeemer, Christ. A kinsman redeemer has five different roles in Scripture. Describe what Christ did for us as our Redeemer, using these (and other) passages:

Liberator: Luke 4:16-21.

Avenger: Genesis 3:14-15; Malachi 4:1; John 8:39-47.

Restorer of Lost Inheritance: Ephesians 1:11-23.

Legal Defender: 1 John 2:1-2.

New Husband: Isaiah 54:4-8.

Day 4: Read Ruth 3:10-18.

9. How does Boaz respond to Ruth's request?

10. What risks does Boaz face in agreeing to be Ruth's redeemer kinsman?

Day 5: Read Ruth 3 and Isaiah 53.

11. What risks and sacrifices did Christ take/make for His bride, the church?

12. How willing are you to take risks and sacrifice to help strangers, love your neighbor, and spread the gospel to expand God's kingdom and prepare it for His coming? What can you do to improve in this area?

13. What is the basis for the pending relationship of Boaz and Naomi? Of Christ and His bride? How can you apply this to your marriage or your search for a spouse?

## Ruth Study – Lesson 5

### Ruth 4

Day 1: Read Ruth 4:1-6.

1. The plot twist of the unknown redeemer plays out in Ruth 4. While Ruth had to wait for her redemption to finally come, she knew for certain it was coming. What signs did Ruth have (see Ruth 3) of her coming redemption? What signs do you have of your coming redemption? How do these help you wait patiently yet confidently for it to come?
2. In many ways Ruth was certain of her redemption far before the scene in Ruth 3. What her waiting during that period look like? What should your period of waiting for your final redemption look like?

Day 2: Read Ruth 4:1-22.

3. Why does the closer redeemer, the man with no name, not redeem Naomi (and Ruth) by buying the land and marrying Ruth?
4. In Ruth 4, one redeemer redeems, the other redeemer does not. Which of these two names is preserved? Which one's inheritance is preserved? How you might apply Matthew 16:24-27 to this passage?
5. How can you apply Ruth 4 and Matthew 16:24-27 to your life?

Day 3: Read Ruth 4:1-22.

6. Ruth is a book about *hesed*, i.e., steadfast love or covenant faithfulness. We have seen *hesed* from both Ruth (1:16-17, 3:10) and Boaz. Thinking back to Ruth 1, how do we see God's *hesed* to Naomi in today's passage? How is her redemption made complete?
7. Read Judges 21:25 and Ruth 1:1. A second plot twist is revealed in v. 18-22 showing that Ruth is a book about more than God's *hesed* for just a few people. How is God's *hesed* to all His people revealed in the Book of Ruth?

8. The blessings of the elders and the women in Ruth 4 identify Boaz and Obed as redeemers. But along with the genealogy in v. 18-22 (see also Genesis 5 & 11) and Obed's name, which means servant, they also connect Boaz and Obed with redeemers that came before them and after them? Who are these other redeemers? What is their connection and purpose? What passages of Scripture might enlighten this?

Day 4: Read Ruth 1:4, Ruth 4:11-22, Proverbs 31, and Matthew 1:1-6.

9. Using the entire book of Ruth, what similarities does Ruth have with the woman described in Proverbs 31?

10. What other connections with women does Ruth have who may not seem to quite measure up to Proverbs 31? What is there about Ruth herself that doesn't quite measure up?

Day 5: Read Ruth 4:18-22, Matthew 1:1-17, and 1 Corinthians 6:9-11.

11. List some of the men and women in Christ's genealogy who exhibited questionable a character at times.

12. Why would Christ associate himself with these people? See Isaiah 53.

13. See 1 Corinthians 6:9-11. How is the kingdom of heaven open to you and others who were once outside the kingdom looking in?

14. How can we live out God's *hesed* we see in Ruth in our lives, families, and churches today?

## Returning from Exile: A Homily on Ruth

The story of Ruth is one of the most beautiful stories in Scripture. By faith, a young gentile woman is delivered from a pagan land, blessed with a faithful husband, and gives birth to a son renowned through the land who becomes part of the lineage of Jesus Christ.

There is so much to the Book of Ruth that we could spend weeks talking about it. Now don't worry, I'm not going to keep you here that long. But I do want us to spend a little time together so that we can share in the richness of the many stories that can be found in Ruth.

The story of Ruth is also about Elimelech, a man who led his family out of the Land of Promise into disaster and even death.

It is about Naomi, a woman who went out from the land of her birth and abandoned it searching for rest in a place where it could never be found.

It is about Boaz, a man who welcomed Naomi and Ruth back into the land and redeemed Naomi and her family from a situation that—at least to Naomi—seemed hopeless.

It is a story about King David and how he became the King that the Israel desired.

It is about you and me, how we struggle to do what is right in the eyes of the Lord.

But most of all, this story is about Jesus Christ, who redeemed a people for himself, became the King the people had always hoped and prayed for, and brought us home out of exile to the land of promise and rest.

Ruth is about all these things because it is really a portrait in miniature of the story of redemption of God's people that we see portrayed throughout the Bible.

In Genesis 3, Adam and Eve are exiled from the Garden of Eden and from the presence of God because of their disobedience:

Then the LORD God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil. Now, lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever—" therefore the LORD God sent him out from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken. He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life.

From there, the rest of Holy Scripture is the story of the return, or exodus, of the people to God's presence through His grace in Jesus Christ. So the Bible is really one big story of Exile and Exodus, with many micro-stories of Exile and Exodus throughout. We are probably most familiar with the Exile and Exodus story of Israel

when Jacob and his family leave the land for Egypt and return four hundred years later under Moses. But Ruth is also a story of Exile and Exodus, and that's what I want to focus on today.

As the book of Ruth opens, we find the Israelites living under judges in a land of famine. The sad state of the land in famine should be no surprise because we are told in the last verse of Judges, because "In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes."

So rather than enjoy the blessings of Deuteronomy 28:

And if you faithfully obey the voice of the LORD your God, being careful to do all his commandments that I command you today, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth. And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, if you obey the voice of the LORD your God. ... Blessed shall you be when you come in, and blessed shall you be when you go out. ... The Lord will cause your enemies who rise against you to be defeated before you. They shall come out against you one way and flee before you seven ways.

The disobedience of the people had caused them to experience its curses:

But if you will not obey the voice of the LORD your God or be careful to do all his commandments and his statutes that I command you today, then all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you. ... Cursed shall you be when you come in, and cursed shall you be when you go out. ... The LORD will cause you to be defeated before your enemies. You shall go out one way against them and flee seven ways before them.

It is likely that the curse of famine in Ruth came by way of the Midianites, who God was using to punish the nation and came every year at harvest time to raid the land and steal the crops. There was "was a famine in the land" because the Israelites refused to repent from its idol worship and turn to the Lord.

The same was true for Elimelech and Naomi, who had no thought of finding food through repentance. Instead, they packed up their family and left the Land of Promise where they lived in God's presence and sought what they lacked in Moab, the home of historical enemies of Israel and God.

The results were as we might have expected. Elimelech and his two sons died as a result of their disobedience, and Naomi was left with only two Moabite daughters in law. Both of whom she tried to send back to their homes when she decided to return to Israel. We see a glimpse of the state of Naomi's faith at the moment when she told Ruth and Orpah that they would have a better chance of finding rest in pagan Moab than in the Lord's Land of Promise.

However, the Lord had a surprise in store for Naomi—just as He does for us at times today. Where she lacked faith, Ruth, a daughter of pagans, did not. Ruth told her, "Your people shall be my people, and your God my God."

Despite the blessing of a faithful daughter-in-law, Naomi returns to Israel in bitterness, telling the women, “Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. I went away full, and the LORD has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi, when the LORD has testified against me and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me?”

I wish we had time to read the entire book of Ruth today so we could see more fully just how completely wrong Naomi is. But in short, the truth is that Naomi has it backwards; when she and her family went into exile to Moab, they were empty in both body and spirit. They had no food, no faith, and no trust in God that He would provide for them.

It is in Naomi’s exodus out of Moab to the Land of Promise that she was truly full. She left home with a faithless companion in Elimelech, but returns home with a faithful companion in Ruth. She left the land when it was empty of food but returns to the land at the time of harvest where “the LORD had visited his people and given them food.” By leaving the land she had forfeited her inheritance, but God provided for her for a kinsman redeemer in Boaz, who would “perpetuate the name of the dead [that is Elimelech] in his inheritance,” take Ruth as his wife, provide her (and Naomi) a son, another redeemer who “shall be to [Naomi] a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age, for your daughter-in-law who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons, has given birth to him.”

God has done for us the same thing he did for Naomi. We too were cast away from God, bereft of hope, in need of a Redeemer. Then God sent to us the greater Boaz, Jesus Christ, who redeemed us. He “set at liberty [we] who [were] oppressed,” “bruised the head” of our oppressor, “obtained [for us] an inheritance” once lost, was the “the propitiation for our sins,” and became our Husband so we would remember “the reproach of [our] widowhood ... no more.”

Even more than this, through these events God sent to us our King. No longer are we like the Israelites during the times of Judges. At the end of Judges, the people had no king and did what was right in their own eyes. But Ruth ends quite differently, with David, a man and a king after God’s own heart. And of course the line of Boaz and David points us directly to Christ, our King who will rule forever.

So, like Naomi, we have returned from exile. In Christ, we have had our exodus out of rebellion and into obedience, into a land in which we can dwell forever, where all our needs will be met. In Christ, there is longer a cycle of exile and exodus. In Christ, we have the King who was always there for the people if they had only sought Him. So friends, let us live in this hope and truth today by seeking Christ our King, worshipping Him, and doing what is right in His eyes.