

DESERT VIEW BIBLE CHURCH

AN OVERVIEW OF RUTH

RUTH 1:1,6-8,21; 4:17

SEPTEMBER 19

BE SURE TO REFER TO THE HELPFUL COMMENTARY AT THE END FOR YOUR DISCUSSION TIME.

MAIN POINT

The Book of Ruth teaches us that God faithfully and lovingly provides for His children, who ought to respond in faithful obedience.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

In just a few sentences, how would you explain the biblical story up through the first seven books—Genesis through Judges?

If you only read that far and then jumped ahead to the New Testament, what questions might you have?

From what you already know about the Book of Ruth (even if only the title), how is it different from the books of the Bible that precede it?

The Book of Ruth gets its name from one of its principle characters, a Moabite woman named Ruth who was the ancestor of David and Jesus. After reading the Book of Judges, which paints a dark and depressing picture of Israel, the reader is relieved to encounter Ruth. Although the book is relatively short, it is rich in examples of kindness, faith, and patience. It is one of the five scrolls that was to be read during the Jewish festivals, in particular the Festival of Weeks.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

> INTRODUCTION TO AUTHOR AND AUDIENCE

The Talmud attributes the authorship of Ruth to Samuel, but the book itself offers no hint of the identity of its author. We can only speculate about who might have written the Book of Ruth, and its provenance and date

must be deduced from the internal evidence—language and style, historical allusions, and themes. The genealogy at the end and the explanation of archaic customs requires a date during or later than the reign of King David (1011-971 BC), though it could have been written as late as after the exile, when the issue of the inclusion of Gentiles once again became pressing.

Read Ruth 1:1 and Judges 17:6. What can we know about the circumstances of Israel in Ruth's day?

How might the pattern of sin and rebellion among God's people throughout the period of the judges help us understand why Ruth and Naomi's story began with a famine?

The Book of Ruth is set "during the time of the judges" (Ruth 1:1), a period of social and religious disorder when "everyone did whatever he wanted" (Judg. 17:6). Historically, this era bridged the time between the conquest of the land under Joshua and the rise of King David, whose genealogy forms the conclusion of the book. It is not clear exactly when during the time of the judges the book belongs, but it opens with a famine in the land, which may have been the result of Israel's idolatry.

Up to this point in the biblical narrative, what would you say had been the experience or role of non-Jews?

Ruth's covenantal faithfulness to Naomi and her God provided a model showing that those who were not ethnic Israelites could be incorporated into the people of God through faith. If Moabites who joined themselves to the Lord could be accepted, there was hope for other Gentiles as well (Isa. 56:3-7). The book also effectively answered questions that may have been raised over the legitimacy of the Davidic line, given his Moabite roots.

> MESSAGE AND PURPOSE

Read Ruth 1:21. How would you describe Naomi's view of God? What obstacles tend to keep people from understanding God's grace?

Naomi thought that the Lord's hand of judgment was upon her after she and her husband left the promised land in search of food and married their sons to Moabite women in search of offspring (1:21). She underestimated God's grace. Her daughter-in-law, Ruth the Moabitess, turned out to be the means by which the Lord would meet her needs for food and offspring to carry on the family name. Ruth's choice of a place to glean, which seemed to be a matter of chance, turned out to be a divine appointment with Boaz, the man who would fulfill the role of family redeemer for Naomi and Ruth.

Read Luke 15:11-32 and Ruth 1:1,7. What similarities can be found with the parable of the lost son?

The Book of Ruth resembles the parable of the lost son in two strands. The family of Elimelech wandered away from the land where the Lord had promised to bless His people in search of fullness. As a result, however, Naomi ended up empty and alone. Yet the Lord's judgment on her was designed to bring her back home and to replace her emptiness with a new fullness. Similarly, the Book of Ruth opens with the Lord's people experiencing the trials of the days of the judges, when general disobedience led to famine. Yet the Lord graciously provided food for His hungry people and a king to meet their needs for leadership. These are lessons that speak to us as well. We too have gone astray from the Lord and need to receive His grace and mercy.

Read Ruth 1:6; 4:17. In what ways do you see God providing for His people? Did they know it at the time? What does this teach you about God's provision in your life and your response to it?

The genealogy of David at the end of the book shows that the Lord worked through this story to provide for His people's need of a king. Even though the Lord's actions are mainly concealed, there are two specific events attributed directly to Him—providing food for His people (Ruth 1:6) and conception for Ruth (Ruth 4:13). In these ways, the Lord provided for all of His people's needs.

Faithful love: Read Ruth 1:8; 2:20; 3:10. What key word do we find in the Book of Ruth? What is the relationship between godly living and the experience of receiving God's blessing?

The Book of Ruth demonstrates how the Lord shows His covenant faithfulness to His undeserving people, often in surprising ways. In the course of the narrative, each of the main characters proved to be a person of extraordinary courage and covenant love. These are people whose spiritual commitment was demonstrated clearly in godly living.

The family redeemer: Read Matthew 1:5-6,16. Ultimately, what is the Book of Ruth's place in the grand narrative of the overall gospel story? Why is it important for us to understand God's plan of redemption throughout the entire Old Testament?

The Book of Ruth provides a great example of a family member who used his power under Jewish law to redeem. Boaz demonstrated one of the duties of the family member—that of marrying the widow of a deceased family member. A correlation is sometimes made between the redemption of Ruth by Boaz and the redemption of sinners by Christ. Because of God's covenant faithfulness, He has provided the Redeemer that we all need in Jesus Christ. Jesus is the true King toward whom the genealogy of David will ultimately extend (Matt. 1:5-6), and He is the Redeemer in whom His wandering people find rest. In Him, the Gentiles too are incorporated into the people of God by faith and granted a place in the family of promise.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Based on today's overview, what do you hope to learn from our study of the Book of Ruth?

Of the major themes we discussed—grace, providence, faithful love, family redeemer—which are you most curious to learn more about? Which do you find most challenging?

How might you share the gospel with others through the story of Ruth?

PRAYER

Thank God for His lovingkindness and faithfulness, which He has displayed throughout the course of human history. Ask Him to open your eyes and heart to who He is as you open His Word in study of Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz.

COMMENTARY

RUTH 1:1

“During the time of the judges” identifies the events of this story as taking place during a time when “everyone did whatever he wanted” (lit “what was right in his own eyes”), when “there was no king in Israel” (Judg. 21:25). During the time of the judges, a famine in the land probably would have been part of God’s judgment on His people for their apostasy from Him, pursuing the Baals and Ashtoreths (see Judg. 2:11-15). This famine even affected Bethlehem, whose Hebrew name means “house of bread.” As a result, one family from that city did what was right in their own eyes and left the promised land, going to live in the pagan land of Moab, where economic prospects seemed brighter. Somewhere along the way, that temporary move turned into a permanent stay.

RUTH 1:6-8

Naomi had little choice but to leave Moab and return home, a move encouraged by the news that the Lord was “providing ... food there.” This points to repentance on the part of the Hebrews and their restoration. Naomi asked the Lord’s blessing upon her daughters-in-law in the form of His faithful love. This is a covenantal term that combines love and faithfulness, mercy and grace—all the positive aspects of committed

relationship. It is a remarkable request that the Lord's favor should be shown in this way to covenant outsiders like these foreign women. .

RUTH 1:20-21

The first and fourth phrases use a title for God (Shaddai) that is probably derived from an ancient word for "mountain," denoting strength and stability; significantly it occurs in the establishment of the covenant in Genesis (17:1). The second and third phrases use the covenant name for the Lord found in Exodus (e.g., 3:14).

Naomi got one thing absolutely right: God is sovereign. Her view of sovereignty was skewed, however, because (as others have observed) she saw only God's power without his pity, she saw sovereignty without sympathy, she saw justice without grace. She saw herself as the bull's-eye at the center of God's cosmic target.

RUTH 4:17

The name itself (Obed means "servant") is probably a shortened form of Obadiah ("servant of the Lord"). First-time Jewish readers who arrived at this point in the story would have had their breath taken away as they discovered that the baby was none other than the father of Jesse, the father of David!

One of the grand themes of Scripture that is reflected in this section is that God desires to move his children from a sense of insecurity and fear to a sense of peace and contentment. Naomi began with emptiness (1:21), and went from the security of this life (being filled) to a sense of purpose in this life (or being fulfilled, 4:14-17). At the end she knew that there had been a plan according to which everything worked together for good (Rom. 8:28). The original readers of this story were able to stand even further back and evaluate the circumstances of her life because they knew even more—that God's plan was unfolding beyond Naomi's lifetime. God took her through emptiness and brought about the line of David. Modern readers are able to stand back with even greater distance than the original readers of Ruth and know that there is something more—from the line of David would come the Messiah (2 Sam. 7:13; Luke 1:32-33)!