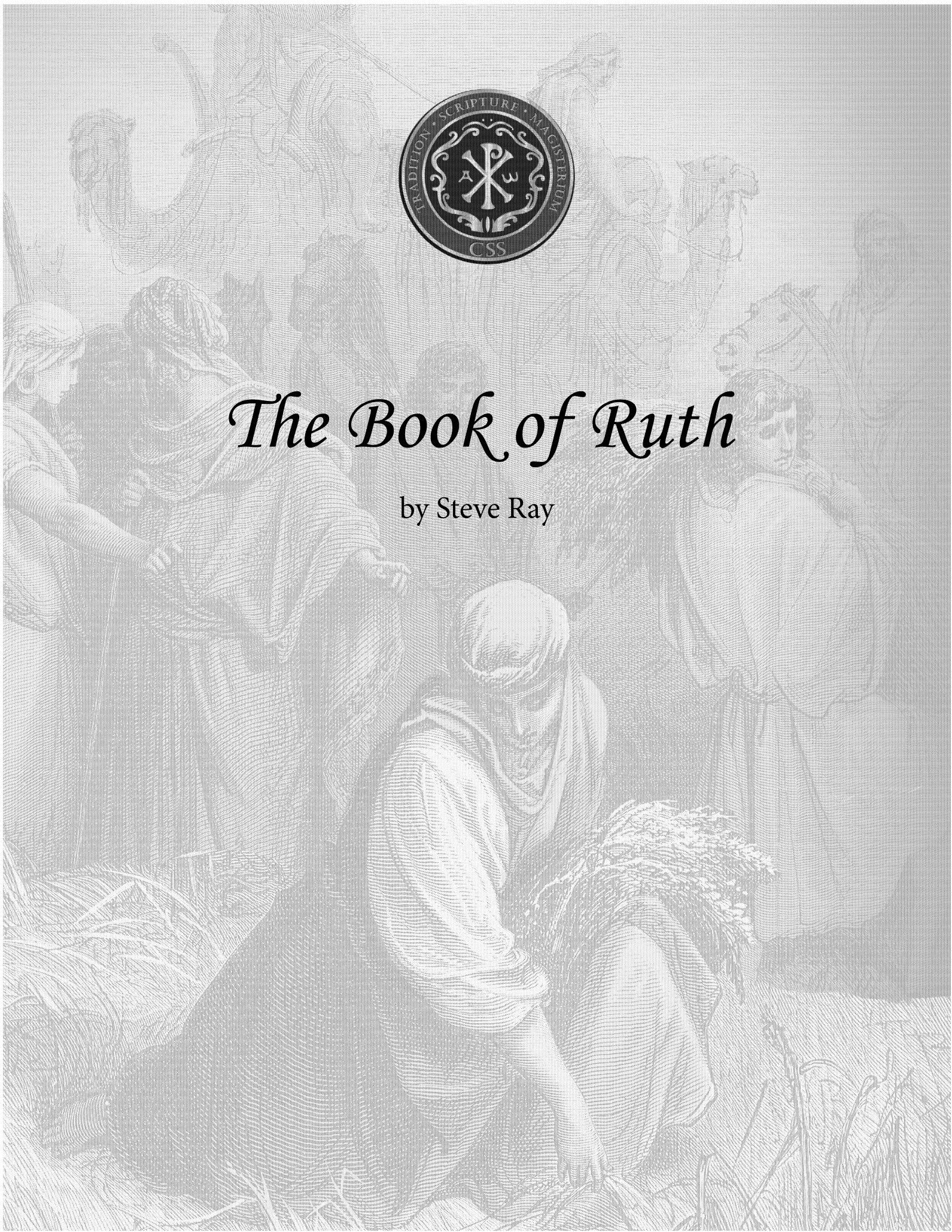


The Book of Ruth

by Steve Ray





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In the Beginning: A Brief Description of the Pentateuch (Creation to Moses)

When you pick up a new book do you start reading at page 62 or 157? Of course not—usually you begin a book on the first page. This way you have the context, you know the plot, and you become familiar with the main characters. To begin a story in the middle is to miss essential elements that make a story *a story*, or a poem *a poem*, or an historical outline *an outline*.

The Bible is the living and active word of God. It is the inspired (“God-breathed”), authoritative, inerrant word of God. But it is also a story, a saga of salvation that has a beginning, a middle, and an end. There is a sequence of events, and every passage of Scripture fits somewhere along the timeline. Just as it is not wise or effective to pick up an average book and read it out of sequence, neither is it wise to pick up the Bible and just start reading in the middle without having some idea of the plot, the characters, or the context. Because, however, the Bible is the Word of God it is powerful no matter what passage we read (e.g., the Psalms, Proverbs, etc.), but the reading and contemplation of the story of God’s salvation is richer and far more meaningful if it is read in context in order to facilitate one’s understanding of “the big picture.”

So how does our understanding of God’s “big picture” begin to be formed? Where is our “page one” of God’s story of salvation history?

There are five books that precede all other books of the Bible. As a unit they are called the Pentateuch, from *penta*, meaning “five,” and *teukhos*, meaning “scroll” or “book.” These five books lay the foundation for all biblical study. They are the root and the foundation for all that follows. They are *Genesis*, *Exodus*, *Leviticus*, *Numbers*, and *Deuteronomy*. In the beginning God creates the heavens and the earth. This happens in the first chapters of Genesis. God creates man and woman in his image. God is the source and purpose of their existence, and everything is good. But they rebel against their Creator, and sin enters the world. Sin, like a cancer, subsequently permeates and corrupts not only men but their societies and natural environments. Selfishness, misdirected devotion, and death enter the world. From that point on, God begins the great drama of salvation.

Like a lost and rebellious son who has turned in disobedience from his father, mankind has rushed toward destruction. Like a devoted father, God pursues man with tender love, deliverance, discipline, and redemption. God makes covenants with his estranged mankind to draw them closer and to reestablish the lost bond between Creator and creation, between Father and sons. God establishes ever expanding covenantal relationships with men as He reveals more of himself and his divine plan of redemption. Adam and Eve messed up everything, but God has promised to restore the lost innocence.

Noah survives the destruction of God’s cleansing of the earth from wicked mankind. God calls Abraham away from worshipping idols in the pagan land of Mesopotamia and promises him his own land. God establishes a covenant with the faithful and obedient Abraham who believes and trusts God. He takes him to the fruitful and strategically located land of Canaan. He promises it to Abraham and to his descendants after him. Abraham has a son of promise named Isaac who begets

Jacob and Esau. God renews his covenant with Jacob and blesses him with twelve sons, who become the heads of the twelve tribes of Israel. Jacob is given the new name *Israel*, from which the land gets its name. The twelve tribes of Israel go to Egypt during a famine. They multiply and prosper in Egypt, and eventually the Pharaoh, out of fear of their growing strength and numbers, turns them into slaves. After the people of Israel suffer 400 years of bondage, God raises up a deliverer named Moses.

God uses Moses to deliver his people from bondage in Egypt and to realize the promise God made to Abraham—that his descendants would possess the land of Canaan (known later as Israel). With tremendous power and miracles, Moses leads the children of Israel out of Egypt through the Red Sea and through the wilderness to Mount Sinai. Here at the mountain God gives his newly delivered people his law. It is called the Law of Moses because it was revealed to Moses and written down for posterity. The people do not trust God, however, and even after seeing his divine power and love, they grumble against God and Moses, and they are condemned to wander in the wilderness of Sinai for forty years until that wicked generation dies out.

Moses is a strong national leader. He holds the huge number of people together as a shepherd as they follow God who leads them eventually to the Promised Land. In the wilderness they are instructed by God and given his tabernacle, which contains the ark of the covenant, at which the presence of God dwells. A priesthood is established and a national structure. No earthly king is appointed. God is their king, and He works through his prophet and law-giver Moses. After forty years the people arrive at the threshold of the Promised Land. Moses dies before entering the Promised Land but not before laying his hands on his faithful servant Joshua and passing his authority on to him, including the mandate to begin the conquest of Canaan.

With an understanding of these first chapters, we now have an historical context for all the books of the Bible that follow. We know the key plot: God created the universe, and He created man in His own image, and it was very good. Through man's rebellion, sin entered the world. Sin brought death to mankind and disharmony to the world made for man. God promised to restore mankind and the fallen world to their original innocence. We also know the key characters: Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and his 12 sons (Israel), and Moses. God formed profound covenant relationships with these characters to build a foundation for the salvation of the world.

As the story progresses from here, we know that all the drama points that follow will be oriented toward God's enduring faithfulness to the typically faith-*less* people whom He loves beyond measure. What is unfolding is an epic drama and love story, spanning the creation of the world to its final destiny, which ultimately is Jesus Christ. Indeed, the Pentateuch is a template for God's redemption of not only Israel, but all mankind—a plan to bring all humanity back to Him.

Now that we have laid the foundation and understand the flow of the story up to this point, we are ready to dive into the exciting and instructive chapters of God's salvation that follow.

The Book of Ruth

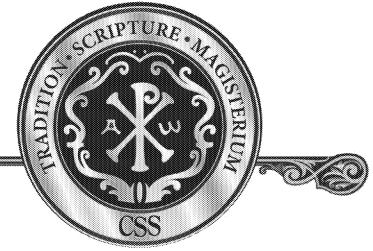
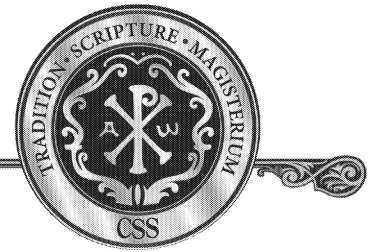


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Book of Ruth



Introduction

A Love Story

Love stories never grow old. Happy endings always charm us. Unselfish loyalty, enduring faithfulness, and loving family bonds grip our hearts and fill our eyes with tears. Everyone has his or her favorite love story, either personal or among the great literature of the world.

William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, written over 400 years ago, is still read and played out on stage and silver screen today. The tragedy of Cleopatra and Marc Antony is relived in every generation. My wife and daughters gather at least once a year to watch the saga of Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. Who doesn't remember the tragic epic *Gone with the Wind*?

Not all stories of loyalty, love, and single-hearted devotion are between lovers. Many dramas like *Where the Red Fern Grows* or *Black Beauty* are touching stories of young people and their beloved dogs or horses. Furthermore, dramas like *A Beautiful Life* and *Steel Magnolias* poignantly depict the loving relationships between parents and children as well as life-long friends.

There is a reason why such stories of passion and love never fade in popularity. Virtuous traits of faithfulness, devotion, and fidelity between friends or lovers never grow old and always inspire us to greatness. They draw us higher up and deeper in with a desire to live out the image of God that he impresses on each of our souls.


One of the world's oldest love stories is about a young heroine named Ruth.¹ Her husband dies, and with the purity of familial devotion she clings to her mother-in-law, Naomi. The true story has resonated down through 3,000 years of literature, contained in the living word of God, the Holy Bible. *Ruth* is one of only three books in the Bible to bear the name of a woman—the other two being Judith and Esther.

Author and Date

The book of *Ruth* was probably written during or shortly after the life of Israel's King David (ruled c. 1010 and 970 B.C.) or his son Solomon (970-930 B.C.). This would make sense because the story of Ruth, though in itself a beautiful account of selfless love, was certainly propelled to greater popularity and importance when young David, the great grandson of Ruth, became the quintessential king of Israel. He was a ruddy handsome king and a man after God's own heart (1 Sam 16:12, Acts 13:22). Ruth was no longer just a loyal young daughter-in-law but was now the great grandmother of the ideal king of Israel. The family account was probably passed down from generation to generation with great affection. Then it was permanently put to the sacred page to be preserved for all time.

The book itself does not inform us of its author or the date of composition. Jewish tradition claims that the prophet Samuel wrote the story, but this is not certain and doubted by most scholars. The date is equally uncertain. Some scholars suggest an earlier date between 1000-700 B.C. The style

¹ To aid the reader in understanding the text, references to *Ruth* the book will be in *italics*. References to Ruth the woman will be in normal text.



of the Hebrew and the book's obvious interest in King David (Ruth 4:17, 22) lend to an earlier date. Certain Aramaic phrases have led some commentators to propose it is much later, even after the return of the exiles from Babylon around 500 B.C. Some have suggested that *Ruth* was written after Nehemiah and Ezra as a response to the problem of foreign wives among the returning exiles (Ezra 9:1ff, Neh 13:23ff).

However, this argument is not compelling. *Ruth* does not strike the reader as a later polemical piece written as a protest against Israel's obedience to the exclusive national laws of God; rather, it exudes the opposite. It comes across as an authentic account of a woman whose conduct supports and confirms the laws of the land and their proper application.

Many scholars refute the arguments against a later date and maintain a date in the early monarchical period. Oral tradition of the true account was possibly passed on by story-tellers or ancestral chroniclers of Israel's history. Evidence indicates *Ruth* was finally written down in a final form during or shortly after the time of King Solomon.

Purpose in its Contemporary Setting and in Light of Further Revelation

Ruth is a simple account of a family living in rural Israel during the era of the judges, which covered roughly 330 years from 1425-1095 B.C. We know the story took place during the turbulent time of the judges because the book opens, "In the days when the judges ruled there was a famine in the land" (Ruth 1:1)... "In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes" (Ruth 17:6). The judges ruled in Israel after the death of Joshua up until Saul was anointed the first king of Israel. It was not a pretty period in the history of Israel. The beautiful idyll of *Ruth* stands like a fragrant lily in a stagnant pool.

We cannot be sure why the author wrote the story other than to pass on a biography of humility, love, and faithfulness to inspire future generations of God's people. This would be enough to justify this profoundly beautiful narrative. The author may also be demonstrating the providence of God as he infuses Ruth's life with rich meaning in response to her devotion, humility, and faithfulness as she accepts the God of Israel and his people as her own. It also serves to show how peaceful and orderly society can work when the people follow the laws of God and fulfill their obligations to self, God, and the community.

With the benefit of further revelation and the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, the account of Ruth takes on deeper importance for us today. In the larger picture, Ruth exemplifies God's acceptance of the Gentiles. Ruth is not an Israelite. She is a foreigner, a daughter of the Moabites, who were a perennial enemy of Israel. Normally, she would have no place with the people of God. Sons of Israel were forbidden from marrying foreign women. But in this case Ruth humbly sought the God of Israel and his people and was incorporated into the covenant life of Israel. It is an early indication of God's redemption extended to both Jew and Gentile. As St. Peter would say later, "Truly I perceive that God shows no partiality but in every nation any one who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him" (Acts 10:34-35).

Ruth is an important link in the family line of King David and ultimately of Jesus Christ. Apart from Mary there are four women mentioned in Jesus' genealogy: Tamar the Canaanite, Rahab the foreign harlot, Ruth the Moabite, Bathsheba wife of a Hittite and taken in adultery by David (Mt 1:3, 5, 6). It is interesting that St. Matthew makes no attempt to "clean up" the ancestry of Jesus. The women

mentioned are not the ideal relatives. In modern times we might refer to some as “skeletons in the closet.” Three are foreigners, one a harlot, and two gave birth through illicit liaisons. But God draws straight with crooked lines. The story of Ruth gives us great hope in God’s mercy, love, and redemption.

Ruth is one of the holy women whose mission prepared the way for Mary. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states this with confidence. Ruth is specifically included with Eve, Hannah, Deborah, Judith, Esther, and other women who were chosen by God to demonstrate that against all human expectation God chooses the humble and poor to demonstrate faithfulness to his promises (CCC 489).

Above the statue of the sleeping Mary in the Abbey of the Dormition on Mount Zion in Jerusalem, there is a beautiful golden mosaic. Christ is in the center looking down at his mother. Surrounding him are the images of six holy women who prepared the way for Mary and were examples of holiness, obedience, and faithfulness. Holding her sheaves of wheat, Ruth is among these heroic women.

Summary and Outline

This little book contains four chapters. These chapters tell the story of a family who migrates from Bethlehem in Israel to Moab during a famine. The husband Elimelech dies in Moab leaving his wife Naomi with their two sons, Mahlon and Chilion. The two sons eventually marry Moabite women: Ruth and Orpah. Subsequently, Naomi’s two sons die, leaving her a widow with two Gentile daughters-in-law. Orpah decides to remain in Moab, but Ruth accompanies Naomi back to Israel where they live in Bethlehem. Through an intriguing series of events, Ruth marries the rich kinsman-redeemer Boaz, and she gives birth to a son named Obed, who in turn has a son named Jesse, who becomes the father of David.

The story can almost be viewed as a theatrical play with the curtain opening and closing on various scenes. Naomi is the main character of the first scene; Ruth is center stage in scenes two and three; Boaz stars in scene four; and scene five is the joyous conclusion with the whole town joining Naomi. Being a true story only enhances its dramatic structure. The author who put the story to paper knew how to craft a tale by rotating various characters to the front, building suspense, leaving much to the imagination, utilizing romance and intrigue, building in illusions to the historical context, and subtly drawing the reader into the drama.

Traditionally, the chapter titles have followed two formats. The first format highlights the plot of the overall drama narrative:

Chapter 1: An Israelite Family Migrates from Bethlehem to Moab

Chapter 2: Two Widows Return to Israel

Chapter 3: Meeting between Boaz and Ruth

Chapter 4: Redemption and Marriage of Ruth & Genealogy of David through Boaz and Ruth

The second format emphasizes Ruth’s role in the narrative:

Chapter 1: Ruth’s Resolve

Chapter 2: Ruth’s Rights

Chapter 3: Ruth’s Request

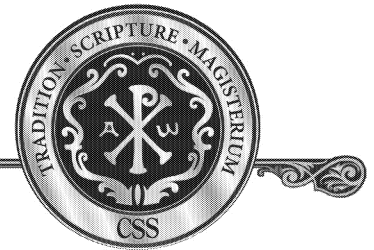
Chapter 4: Ruth’s Reward



For the purpose of this study, the lessons will be titled according to the descriptive titles in the first format above, although it may be helpful for the reader to keep in mind the second format in order to consider the progress of Ruth's personal journey throughout the story.



Book of Ruth



Lesson 1: An Israelite Family Migrates from Bethlehem to Moab

Introduction

For most of us working through this Scripture study, we will have no concern about from where our food will come today or next week. We will simply get in the car, drive to the local grocery store, buy the food, and stock the shelves back home. It has not always been that way. In times past and in many parts of the world today, food is a scarce commodity. Too often it is limited by the whims of nature, poor distribution, or lack of money.

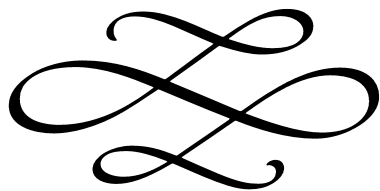
Such it was in Bethlehem about 3,000 years ago. There were no delivery trucks, mega malls, or grocery stores. People ate what they could scratch from the ground or produce from their flocks scattered across rural countryside. The availability of food drove the direction and lives of most families.

One family failed to thrive and decided to leave the land of Yahweh, Israel's God, and travel to Moab in search of sustenance. Their forefather Abraham migrated to Egypt when a drought hit the land (Gen 12:10). Their patriarch Jacob (from whom Israel got its name) and his sons went from Judea to Egypt in search of bread (Gen 42:1-2). Sojourning in foreign lands was not uncommon.

Under duress, Elimelech, his wife Naomi, and two sons, Mahlon and Chilion, left their hometown of Bethlehem nestled in the territory of Judea in Israel where Elimelech had an inheritance of land. They crossed over the Jordan Valley into the mountains of Moab. Here they settled down temporarily in their new home. The years passed. Sadly, death came to the family's provider, Elimelech, and then to his two sons, Mahlon and Chilion, who had married Moabite wives. Three grieving widows, Naomi and her two young daughters-in-law, were left alone to consider their fate.



Chemosh, the god of Moab



Ruth 1:1-18

¹ In the days when the judges ruled there was a famine in the land, and a certain man of Bethlehem in Judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons. ² The name of the man was Elimelech and the name of his wife Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion; they were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah. They went into the country of Moab and remained there. ³ But Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died, and she was left with her two sons. ⁴ These took Moabite wives; the name of the one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth. They lived there about ten years; ⁵ and both Mahlon and Chilion died, so that the woman was bereft of her two sons and her husband. ⁶ Then she started with her daughters-in-law to return from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the country of Moab that the LORD had visited his people and given them food. ⁷ So she set out from the place where she was, with her two daughters-in-law, and they went on the way to return to the land of Judah. ⁸ But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go, return each of you to her mother's house. May the LORD deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me. ⁹ The LORD grant that you may find a home, each of you in the house of her husband!" Then she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept. ¹⁰ And they said to her, "No, we will return with you to your people." ¹¹ But Naomi said, "Turn back, my daughters, why will you go with me? Have I yet sons in my womb that they may become your husbands? ¹² Turn back, my daughters, go your way, for I am too old to have a husband. If I should say I have hope, even if I should have a husband this night and should bear sons, ¹³ would you therefore wait till they were grown? Would you therefore refrain from marrying? No, my daughters, for it is exceedingly bitter to me for your sake that the hand of the LORD has gone forth against me." ¹⁴ Then they lifted up their voices and wept again; and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her. ¹⁵ And she said, "See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law." ¹⁶ But Ruth said, "Entreat me not 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, and your God my God;** ¹⁷ where you die I will die, and there will I be buried. May the LORD do so to me and more also if even death parts me from you." ¹⁸ And when Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more.

Points to Ponder

A Brief History of Bethlehem

Bethlehem was not a large city. Around the 8th century B.C., in the same general timeframe *Ruth* was written, the prophet Micah wrote, "But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days" (Mic 5:2).

Bethlehem is located in the heart of Judah, which was the land apportioned to the tribe of Judah when the Twelve Tribes of Jacob received their allotments in the land of Canaan, now called Israel. Elimelech's family is called Ephrathites of Bethlehem. It is thought that at some point Ephrath was an area that encompassed Bethlehem. Genesis suggests the two names are synonymous (cf. Gen 35:19).

By Elimelech and Naomi's day, Bethlehem already had a long history. It was here that Jacob buried his wife Rachel after she died in childbirth (cf. Gen 35:16-20). Her tomb is still there to this day. In Judges 19 we learn of some bizarre happenings in Bethlehem, not unlike the condemnable practices of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Names in the Book of Ruth
Elimelech: My God is King
Naomi: Pleasantness, delight (later
Mara, Bitterness)
Mahlon: Invalid, sickly
Chilion: Wasting away, death
Ruth: Companion, friendship
Boaz: In him is strength

When the Judges Ruled

Our story of *Ruth* took place when the “judges ruled,” which places the events before the monarchies of Saul, David, and Solomon. It was a period of about 330 years nestled between Joshua’s conquest of the Promised Land and the anointing of King Saul. It was a time rife with the cycles of blessing, disobedience, scandal, foreign invasions, subjugation, repentance, and deliverance. Judges were used by God to rule and deliver his people. We are familiar with some of their names: Deborah, Gideon, and Samson. Ruth’s point in history must have been during one of the times of peace, or Bethlehem was far


enough south to avoid some of the calamities. Either way, we see none of the political intrigue or invasions taking place in this story. The only problem faced is a famine which has swept the land. The name Bethlehem is made up of two words meaning “house of bread.” Yet at this point in history, there was no bread in the house of bread. Such things were usually ushered in by a lack of rain, which still periodically haunts the land in modern times.

A Family’s Sojourn

So the family of four makes the difficult decision to pack their belongings, to load them presumably on donkeys, to say good-bye to family and close friends, and to set off on the arduous journey to an unknown reception in a foreign and often enemy country. Their journey would have taken them at least 60 to 100 miles, depending on their route around the northern tip of the Dead Sea and final destination over the mountains into Moab on the eastern side of the sea. Moab was a perennial enemy of Israel and one of the countries that invaded during the period of the judges. Moab was a son of Abraham’s nephew Lot, whose conception resulted from an incestuous relationship between Lot and his eldest daughters while he was in a drunken stupor.

Elimelech and his family arrived in Moab and intended to “sojourn” there. *Sojourn* is a common biblical word referring to a foreigner or alien who lives among another people for a temporary though extended period of time. Abraham is the prototype—he left his homeland and sojourned in the land of Canaan. Unfortunately, some short time after settling into this foreign land, Elimelech died. Naomi remained in Moab with her two sons, who both violated the Law of Moses by marrying Moabite women (Deut 7:3-4). The first wife was named Orpah, and the second was named Ruth. They lived in Moab for about 10 years before both Mahlon and Chilion died. Naomi grieved at the loss of her husband and two sons. Her grief was made all the more difficult by her living away from relatives and friends in a foreign land.

Nothing is known of the family’s daily life in Moab—that is not what is important to the story. The real story begins when Naomi discovers that “the Lord has visited his people and given them food” (Ruth 1:6). Two words jump out in this passage and are quite interesting. First, the Hebrew word used for “food” is *lehem*. Does that look familiar? Remember the meaning of Bethlehem—House of Bread? God had remembered his people in the House of Bread and again has given them bread.



Second, the word “visited” in Hebrew means more than a “brief visit.” Rather, the word visit (*paqad*) can mean to inflict injury or harm, such as to punish or, in a great number of cases, to bestow a beneficial result.

God evaluates and looks after his people. He, their Sovereign, has taken notice, and his response is to remove the drought and bless them with bread or a good harvest. The verb used is somewhat of a warning that their conduct is crucial, and they must not presume upon God’s graciousness but strive to live in obedience to him, knowing that he desires to feed and bless them. The *Book of Judges* displays this cycle of God’s punishment and blessing based on the disobedience or obedience of his people. *Ruth* takes place during the period of the judges so it is probable that Bethlehem was part of the wider cycle of Israel’s disobedience, punishment, repentance, and blessing.

Returning Home

Naomi decides to take her chances and return home. At least there she would be among her kin and realize some security. There was also the issue of land owned by Elimelech. Showing great loyalty and devotion, the two daughters-in-law begin the journey with Naomi. Along the way Naomi realizes that the two women would be better off to stay in Moab in their mother’s homes. They obviously have a very strong bond between them. They are ready to follow Naomi, and she is looking out for their best. She puts them into the care of God and suggests they go back to their father’s homes to find another husband from among their own people. She kisses them both, probably much the same way family and friends show affection in the Middle East even today by kissing each cheek, and they all weep at their misfortune and the thought of parting.


Naomi explains that she has no sons for them to marry and therefore no future security to provide for them. Naomi also knows that it is unlikely that an Israelite would marry a woman with Moabite blood flowing through her veins. In ancient cultures there was no social security or welfare system. A husband or son was crucial for the security and provisions of a woman, especially in her old age. This is also exemplified in the New Testament when Jesus delegates the Apostle John to become his mother’s son since she had no other sons to care for her after the death of Jesus (Jn 19:26-27).

The name “Naomi” means “pleasant” or “delight,” but now she says she is “bitter” for “the hand of God has gone forth against me.” Orpah and Ruth both refuse Naomi’s request that they turn back until Orpah is persuaded to return to her family’s house. She ends their formal relationship with a kiss and returns home to Moab. It seems the only reasonable course of action.

Ruth’s Conversion of Heart

But Ruth clings to Naomi. Here Naomi makes a remarkable observation, which is the magic key to the whole saga—the curtain pulled back on the very soul of Ruth! If you are looking for the key to the book of *Ruth* look no further than verses 1:15-17. Naomi says, “Your sister-in-law [Orpah] has gone back to her people and to her gods.” Orpah is pragmatic. She takes the path of least resistance by returning to her pagan family and their foreign demon gods (cf. 1 Cor 10:20). The national god of Moab was Chemosh.

Ruth, on the other hand, experiences a profound conversion. She abandons her former demon god Chemosh to follow the true and living God, Yahweh of Israel. In choosing the true God she experiences the sacrifice later referred to by Jesus, “He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he who loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and he who does



not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for my sake will find it” (Mt 10:37–39).

Ruth is a foreigner and a Gentile. St. Paul says that Gentiles were “alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world” (Eph 2:12). Ruth must have heard about the God of Israel from Naomi and chooses to follow her God even if it means losing her own gods, land, ancestry, and family. It is the terrifying yet enthralling moment when one firmly decides to abandon one’s roots in one group to permanently join another—with no possibility of turning back. Naomi and Ruth alone remain on stage.

We are now prepared for one of the loveliest expressions of devotion and affection ever uttered by human lips. It is so sublime and eloquent a statement of love that my wife and I used it in our marriage vows. It has become our motto throughout the years. After turning away from Moab, her family, and the pagan gods, Ruth looks to Naomi, and for the first time we hear the words of Ruth as she resolutely pledges to follow Naomi. Ruth gracefully states, “Entreat me not 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, and your God my God; where you die I will die, and there will I be buried. May the Lord do so to me and more also if even death parts me from you” (Ruth 1:16–17).

What ethereal poetry of the heart! Ruth surrenders all rights, all her past, her family, and her gods—everything. She devotes herself to Naomi and Naomi’s people and Naomi’s God. There is more poetry and beauty here than a hundred pages could fathom. Notice the nice flow from verses 15-16: “her god...your God...my God.”

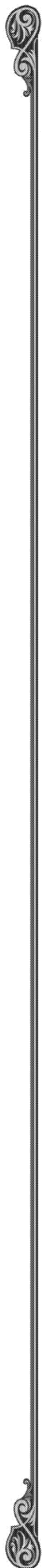
One shudders to ask, “Do I love and conduct myself with those close to me to deserve such heartfelt words of devotion and ardor from others? Do I so inspire those close to me that they will abandon all to cling to me and to my God?”

Ruth has chosen the best part: “And when Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more” (Ruth 1:18). Even without specifically knowing it, Ruth clings not only to her mother-in-law, Naomi, but also to her own future descendant, who would say, “And every one who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name’s sake, will receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life” (Mt 19:29).

Study Questions

It is best to read the entire Scripture passage for this lesson (Ruth 1:1-18) and the Points to Ponder before responding to the study questions below.

1. Why do Elimelech and his family leave Bethlehem? What does this suggest about God’s relationship with His people in Israel at that point in time? (See Ruth 1:1, 1:6, Points to Ponder)



2. The author of *Ruth* tells us the story takes place “in the days when the judges ruled” (Ruth 1:1). When was this time period, who were the judges, and how did they serve the people of Israel? (See Points to Ponder)
3. Elimelech’s migration to Moab is described as a “sojourn” (Ruth 1:1). What is the biblical significance of this term? Who is a prototype, and how might his sojourn relate to Elimelech’s? (See Points to Ponder, CCC 59)
4. After the deaths of Elimelech, Mahlon, and Chilion, why does Naomi encourage her two young daughters-in-law to return to their Moabite families? (See Ruth 1:8-13, Points to Ponder)

5. What is Orpah's response to Naomi's request to return "to her people and to her gods"? What is Ruth' response, and what does it reveal about her character and faith? (See Ruth 1:16-17, Mt 10:37-39, Points to Ponder)

6. Who are Ruth's future descendants? (See Lesson Introduction, Points to Ponder, Mt 1:5)

Voices of the Saints

"Everything comes from love. All is ordained for the salvation of man. God does nothing without this goal in mind."

~ St. Catherine of Siena



Questions for Reflection

One of the best ways to meditate on God's word is to take it deeply into your life through memorization. The suggested memory verse is always highlighted in the text of the lesson. Or you may choose one of your own. For further reflection, consider these questions:

Rome to Home

It is to the theme of love that I wanted to dedicate my first Encyclical, which was published today; this happy coincidence with the conclusion of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity invites us to consider, even more than our gathering together, the entire ecumenical journey in the light of God's love, of the Love that is God....

True love does not eliminate legitimate differences, but harmonizes them in a superior unity that is not ordered from the *outside* but gives form from *within*, so to speak, to the whole....

Unity is our common mission; it is the condition that enables the light of Christ to be spread better in every corner of the world, so that men and women convert and are saved.

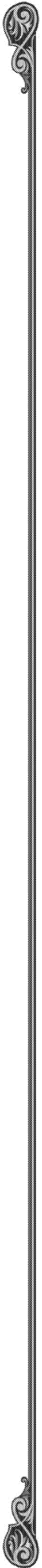
The road stretches before us! And yet, we must not lose trust; instead, with greater vigour we must once more continue our journey together. Christ walks before us and accompanies us. We count on his unfailing presence and humbly and tirelessly implore from him the precious gift of unity and peace.

— Pope Benedict XVI, "A Symphony of Hearts Prays for Christian Unity,"
Homily at the Ecumenical Liturgy of Vespers, January 25, 2006

Summary

In lesson one, we learned:

1. Elimelech, his wife Naomi, and two sons, Mahlon and Chilion, are an Israelite family who leave their hometown of Bethlehem, where Elimelech has an inheritance of land, to travel to the country of Moab in search of food.
2. In Moab, Elimelech dies, and his two sons marry Moabite wives, named Orpah and Ruth. Later, Elimelech's sons also die, leaving Naomi alone with her two young daughters-in-law.
3. Naomi decides to return to her homeland of Bethlehem, for she has heard that "the Lord had visited his people and given them food."
4. Naomi discourages her daughters-in-law from joining her so that they may return to their Moabite families and find husbands.
5. Orpah follows Naomi's request, but Ruth clings to Naomi and chooses to join her on her journey to Bethlehem.
6. Ruth declares to Naomi not only a strong familial affection but also a profound conversion of heart: "...your people shall be my people, and your God my God."



Notes: