

Ruth and Naomi

Women Study

10 July 2012

The biblical setting

- The period in which the events of recorded in the book of Ruth (the time in which the judges ruled) are among the **worst in Israel's history**. Like the period of decline within the ancient Roman Empire, **the Israelite nation began to crumble from within**. The book of Judges repeatedly states that during this time “everyone did as he saw fit”. As each family or group fought for its rights alone, the **society became fractured**.
- The book of Judges runs downhill, from bad to worse. The last five chapters contain some of the **ugliest stories in the Bible** – tales of homosexual assault, idolatry, civil war, thievery, rape and murder. No enemy does all this: **Israelites do it to each other**. Clearly, the exalted nation of Israel, God's chosen people, has **lost its sense of direction**. The book of Ruth shines like a beautiful diamond against this bleak background.

Two women, Ruth and Naomi, stood by each other



Ruth (Gentile) was **poor, a foreigner, and a woman**, and all this counted against her, but she was helped by an older woman to overcome the difficulties she faced. She had the good sense to **listen to the advice** given to her by Naomi (Jew), and the **older woman was rewarded by Ruth's unfaltering loyalty**.

Her story illustrates the triumph of **courage and ingenuity over adverse circumstances**. She has special significance for Christians. In the gospel of Matthew, four women were included in the genealogy of Jesus (Matthew 1:2-17), and Ruth was one of the four.

1st Episode: Where is God?

Read Ruth 1

- Naomi Loses Her Husband and Sons
- Naomi and Ruth Return to Bethlehem
- Significance of names:
 - *Naomi* means *pleasant*
 - *Mara* means *bitter*

Put yourself in the shoes of Naomi

1st Episode: Where is God?

Exploring the passage

- Describe Naomi's condition after ten years in Moab?
- Are you surprised by Ruth decision to stay with her mother-in-law? Why or why not?
- Naomi said that God was against her. Was she right to think and feel this way? Why or why not?

Reflection

- How should suffering affect a person's attitude toward God?
- Have you ever felt empty and afflicted by God as Naomi did? How did you respond? What did God do in your situation?

2nd Episode: God's Providence

- **Naomi's life has been hard.** Ten years earlier things got so bad in Bethlehem after a severe famine, that she emigrated into enemy's land with her husband and two sons just to survive. While living in Moab her two sons married Moabite women – Ruth and Oprah.
- However, **her husband and sons died** and she became a widow without any grand child. Depression strikes and **she felt God is against her.**
- Naomi is now returning to Bethlehem at the beginning of a **barley harvest** with Ruth. "Harvest" speaks of God's blessing and **He was about to end the famine** in Naomi's life.

2nd Episode: God's Providence

Read Ruth 2

- Ruth Meets Boaz in the Grain Field



2nd Episode: God's Providence

Exploring the passage

- Do you see God's actively at work in the story or do you see the events that occur as merely coincidences? If you think God is actively working, how would you describe the nature of his involvement?
- A single woman had few ways to support herself in those days. She could beg, sell herself into slavery, become a prostitute, look for a husband among the eligible men of the village, or seek support from her nearest male relative. Or, during the months of harvest, she could glean. Consider the risks of gleaning and the alternatives facing Ruth and Naomi. What do you learn about Ruth from her work in gleaning to support both herself and her mother-in-law?
 - **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).
- What do you most admire about Boaz in this passage?

Reflection

- How convinced are you that God wants to be involved in your life to accomplish his purposes and plans? What evidence (or lack thereof) can you point to in supporting your conclusions?

3rd Episode: God is in Control

- **Naomi is a case of hardship.** She is deeply saddened by the loss of her husband and two sons who all died while her family lived in Moab.
- Naomi arrives with Ruth in Bethlehem as the barley harvest is beginning. Her daughter-in-law **found favor in the eyes of Boaz** who is related to Naomi. In a dramatic encounter with Ruth on the threshing floor, Boaz agrees to **do the duty of a family** – Redeemer and purchase Naomi's family land so that it is not lost. He also **agrees to marry Ruth** so that he can provide for her children to carry on the name of her dead husband.

3rd Episode: God is in Control

Read Ruth 4

- Boaz Marries Ruth
- Naomi Gains a Son
- The Genealogy of David

3rd Episode: God is in Control

Exploring the passage

- Think about the choices Boaz and the unnamed kinsman each make in Chapter 4:2-10. What do you learn about each man's priorities?
- How did Ruth and Boaz' marriage affect Naomi?
- Remember what Naomi thought God was doing in her life when she was empty of wealth, family, and status? What part did God play in filling her emptiness?

Reflection

- Are there ways that God has shown his faithfulness to you and changed your sorrow to joy?

