

HEARING THE WORD



NIGEL BARGE

Ruth
Workbook

Hearing the Word Ruth Workbook

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Office: 1 School Road, Torrance, Glasgow, G64 4BZ

Tel: 01360 620970 *Email:* hearingtheword@tpc.org.uk

Website: www.torranceparishchurch.org.uk

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Nigel Barge, May 2020

Scripture Quotations taken from

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Resources

The *New Bible Dictionary* 3rd edition, published by Inter Varsity Press
The *New Bible Commentary* 21st century edition. A commentary on every Bible book, IVP
www.blueletterbible.org

This Workbook looks at the story of Ruth

Table of Contents

Hearing the Word: A Tool for Bible reading	4
Reading Narrative	5
Background to the Book of Ruth	6
Study 1 Ruth 1	7
T	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Study 2 Ruth 2	10
The	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Study 3 Ruth 3	13
At the threshing floor	13
Study 4 Ruth 4	14
Boaz marries Ruth	14
Sharing the Word.....	17

Hearing the Word: A Tool for Bible reading



LOOK – What does it *say*?

- 1) The Text
 - a) What questions does it raise - *Who, What, When, Where, Why, How?*
 - b) What surprises you?
- 2) The Context?
 - a) the surrounding text
 - b) the Book of the Bible
 - c) the whole Bible
 - d) the place in the Bible Story



LEARN – What does it *mean*?

- 1) What type of writing is it?
- 2) Answer the questions
- 3) Summarise the passage



LISTEN – What is the *message*?

- 1) Which is the main point?
- 2) Which is the key verse?



LIVE – How should we *respond*?

- 1) What does it show about God, (Father, Son, Holy Spirit) :
 - a) His nature and character?
 - b) His grace*
 - c) Jesus / his salvation**
- 2) What should I do?

* God's undeserved generosity is evident throughout the Bible, and it is perfectly expressed in Jesus.

** The Bible, from 'the Fall' onwards, describes God's plan of salvation through his Son. Thus, *all* the Scriptures speak in some way of Jesus (Luke 24:27).

Reading Narrative

In seeking to hear the Word of God throughout the Bible, we need to take into account the *type of literature* in which each part is written. Ruth is mainly *narrative* (story), the most common type. To approach narrative correctly we need to keep these principles in mind.

1 In General: It is *God's story*

The whole Bible recounts the story of God's dealings with humankind. After creation and the fall in Genesis, the rest describes how God works out his unfolding plan of salvation for humanity in Jesus. The OT prepares for the arrival, life, death and resurrection of Jesus. The NT recounts these and looks forwards to his return at the end of time. It is *all* about Jesus. Therefore:

- a) Every part relates to Him (Luke 24:27; John 5:39).

So as we read, we should be asking – ‘what does this show about Jesus; what is He doing?’

- b) Everything is relevant.

In a film every scene plays some part in the overall story. Often, we are shown things in the early stages that make no sense until later. The Bible is the same. So, as we read Bible narrative – knowing how it ends – we should be asking ‘what relevance has *this* part of the story to the *main* story?’

2 In particular: ‘Follow the camera angle.’

A film director focuses the viewer’s attention on particular shots to tell ‘his story’. In the same way each narrator in the Bible is selective about what to tell us. They leave out much general detail, only giving us what is relevant to what they are trying to convey.

As we read, we should therefore be asking the question, ‘Why is he telling me this, and in this particular way?’

3 Warts and all

Human beings often get things wrong. The Bible narrative faithfully records errors, even by people who are elsewhere commended. For instance, Moses murdered a man, King David committed adultery, and Peter, who was praised one minute for realising Jesus was the Christ, was minutes later roundly scolded when he tried to stop Jesus *being* the Christ through suffering! (Exodus 2:12; 2 Samuel 11; Matthew 16:16-23)

So we can’t treat every thought or action in a narrative as something to copy, just because ‘it’s in the Bible’. We must ask the Holy Spirit to use the rest of Scripture to discern good examples to follow, and bad ones to avoid.

Background to the Book of Ruth

The Author

?

Study 1

Ruth 1

Naomi and Ruth

Background

Before Moses died, the Lord allowed him to *see* Canaan, the Promised Land, even though he was not allowed to *enter* it (Deuteronomy 34).

After his death, **Joshua** became the leader and led the people in the conquest of Canaan (c.1230BC). After Joshua in turn died, there was a period of disorganisation, tribal discord and defeat. The book of **Judges** tells how God ‘raised up judges who saved them.’ (Judges 2:16) They were leaders in battle and rulers in peace. The book of **Ruth** is set within this period (1:1)

Moab was ‘next door’ to Judah, across the Dead Sea. Perhaps the family travelled only 50 to 100 miles. Palestine has a rather uncertain rainfall, so times of drought and famine are not uncommon. Conditions can vary widely over comparatively small areas.

Word List

1	<i>ruled</i>	traditionally <i>judged</i>
	<i>land</i>	<i>ie</i> Canaan, the promised land
	<i>sojourn</i>	live for a while
	<i>Bethlehem</i>	<i>lit</i> ‘House of bread’ <i>ie</i> granary
2	<i>Elimelech</i>	means, God is King <i>or</i> My God is King
	<i>Naomi</i>	means pleasant, lovely, delightful
	<i>Mahlon</i>	possibly from a root meaning ‘to be weak’ or ‘sick’
	<i>Chilion</i>	possibly ‘failing’ or ‘pining’
	<i>Ephrathites</i>	Ephrath or Ephrathah was an earlier name for Bethlehem
6	<i>arose</i>	indicates start of an action, especially a journey
	<i>visited</i>	word used in OT to describe divine activity
8	<i>the LORD</i>	YAHWEH, the personal name of the God of Israel
15	<i>her people</i>	<i>ie</i> her nation
20	<i>Mara</i>	bitter
21	<i>Almighty</i>	Hebrew <i>Shaddai</i> Sometimes <i>El Shaddai</i> , God Almighty
22	<i>barley harvest</i>	<i>ie</i> towards the end of April

Bible Connections

1	<i>famine</i>	<i>see eg</i> Genesis 12:10; 26:1; 41:56; 1 Samuel 21:1
11	<i>levirate marriage</i>	<i>see</i> Deuteronomy 25:5ff
21	<i>Almighty</i>	<i>see</i> Genesis 17:1; 35:11; Exodus 6:3, Psalm 91:1ff

LOOK

1) The Text

What questions does the passage raise?

What surprises or confuses you?

2) The Context

What other parts of the Bible – surrounding passage, individual book, whole Bible, or Bible story – might help you understand this passage?

LEARN

- 1) How do you answer the questions the passage raises?

2) How do you resolve issues that surprised or confused you?

3) Give an overall 'picture' of the passage in a few sentences.

LISTEN

1) What is the lesson or the main point?

2) Which verse best sums up the message of the passage? v.

LIVE

1) What does it show about God (Father, Son, Holy Spirit)?

a) His nature and character?

b) His grace?

c) Jesus and His salvation?

Now underline the application of the Main Point.

2) What should I do?

Now underline the application of the Main Point.

Study 2

Ruth 2

Obey authority and trust the Lord to repay

Background

In ancient Palestine there were not many ways open to widows to make a living. **Gleaning** was one possibility. Provision for the poor was laid down in the laws given to Moses. A man must not reap to the very border of his field, nor pick up what was left after the reapers had been through (Leviticus 19:9) nor go back for a sheaf he had overlooked. (Deuteronomy 24:19) The poor could come and pick up what was left. (That was gleaning). There would be one common field outside a village with people owning parts of it.

Word List

1	<i>Boaz</i>	Meaning not certain, may have idea of quickness/strength, son of Rahab the prostitute (Josh 2:1; Matt 1:5)
	<i>land</i>	<i>i.e.</i> Canaan, the promised land
	<i>Elimelech</i>	Ruth's late father-in-law
5	<i>'Whose young woman...</i>	Boaz assumes Ruth is someone's servant
8	<i>do not go</i>	The Hebrew is emphatic
10	<i>bowed down...</i>	Token of humility and gratitude
11	<i>native land/homeland</i>	Land of your kindred; there is a strong family sense
12	<i>reward</i>	Hebrew denotes 'wages'
	<i>under whose wings</i>	Denotes trust and security
17	<i>ephah</i>	About 22 litres/4 gallons
20	<i>kinsman-redeemer</i>	Hebrew <i>goel</i>
22	<i>my daughter</i>	A term of addressing someone (2:2,8,22; 3:1,10,11,16,18) only used once elsewhere by Jephthah (Judges 11:35)
23	<i>wheat harvest</i>	After the barley harvest (1:22) - 2 months + from beginning of barley to end of wheat

Bible Connections

2	<i>Gleaning</i>	<i>see</i> Leviticus 19:9; Deuteronomy 24:19
12	<i>under God's wings</i>	<i>see</i> Psalm 17:8; 36:7; 63:7
	<i>Jesus as our Redeemer</i>	<i>see</i> Ephesians 1:7; Rom 3:24f; Galatians 3:13; 5:1

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- 2) What should I do?

Now underline the application of the Main Point.

Study 3

Ruth 3

Ruth and Boaz at the Threshing floor

Background

After harvest, grain was separated from its husks by being trodden on by animals, usually pulling a ‘threshing sledge’ made of wood with nails protruding from the underside. Then it was *winnowed*, i.e. the mixture was thrown into the air during a stiff breeze; the wind blew the chaff away and the grain, being heavier, fell more or less straight down. Threshing floors were usually situated in exposed places to catch the breeze. (Unusually, Gideon winnowed hidden in the hollow of his wine press, lest marauding Midianites stole his crop, Judges 6:11.)

At harvest time people would camp out, perhaps to guard the crop.

Kinsman-redeemer. In Leviticus, family relationship involves duties *eg* redeem a relation from slavery (25:48f), redeem a relative’s field (25:25).

A regulation in Deuteronomy 25:5-10 says that if a man dies childless then his next of kin should marry the widow and have a child who would be regarded as the child of the deceased man and carry on his name. This was known as ‘Levirate marriage’.

Word list

- 9 ‘Spreading skirt/corner of garment’ over a woman is used as a metaphor for marriage in Ezekiel 16:8.
- 15 six measures – one short of God’s perfect seven (Gen 2:1-3)

Study 4

Boaz marries Ruth

Ruth 4

Background

Excavations show that houses in Palestinian cities were generally built very closely together; there were no large open spaces like the Roman *forum* or the Greek *agora*. Instead, room was found at the city gate, so the gate became the centre of city life. Any important assembly happened there (1 Kings 22:10; Jeremiah 38:7). It was the place for formal, legal business (2 Samuel 15:2; Amos 5:10,12,15, AV, ESV ‘in the gate’; NIV translates ‘in the courts’). Informally, that was also where people gathered socially.

If a man died childless and his brother refused to marry the widow (see p15 above), Deuteronomy 25:7 told the woman to ‘go to the elders *at the town gate*’ to begin the process of public humiliation of the offender.

It is not clear how Naomi had rights of ownership over her late husband Elimelech’s piece of land. Jeremiah 32:6-12 seems to show that land for sale would normally be offered to a member of the family before anyone else. (That transaction happened not at the city gate, but in the courtyard of the guard of the royal palace (Jer.32:2.) – since Jeremiah was imprisoned there.)

Word List

1	<i>town gate</i>	See above
	‘Friend’	unique in OT to call another ‘friend’
2	<i>ten of the elders</i>	There is no information on significance of 10; elders exercised a judicial function
3	<i>brother</i>	term is not confined to immediate family relationships
4	<i>I cannot redeem</i>	this is strong language
11	<i>Rachel and Leah</i>	wives of Jacob, mothers of his 12 sons <i>see</i> Gen 29:14-28
	<i>worthily</i>	very unusual word. Same root as worthy (2:1; 3:11)
12	<i>Perez</i>	son of Jacob’s son Judah, ancestor of Boaz <i>see</i> Gen 46:12
	<i>Tamar</i>	mother of Perez <i>see</i> Genesis 38
14	<i>Blessed be the Lord</i>	usual way of expressing thankfulness
17	<i>Obed</i>	means ‘servant’; v18-22 show him to be the grandfather

20 *Salmon* of David, Israel's greatest earthly king married Rahab, (previously the prostitute from Jericho who hid the Israelite spies.) *see* Joshua 2; Matthew 1:5

Bible Connection

18 *genealogy of king David* *see* fuller information in 1 Chronicles 2:4-15
 Jesus as our Redeemer *see* Ephesians 1:7; Rom 3:24f; Galatians 3:13; 5:1

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Now underline the application of the Main Point.

Sharing the Word

Use

'Hearing the Word' can be used alone, with one other person, or in a group

Preparing for a group

Time put in alone beforehand will greatly benefit time spent together.

Work through the stages - LOOK, LEARN, LISTEN, LIVE.

Write down your own questions and answers. *

A format

If you have 45 mins together, you might like to try dividing it up like this:

(If longer or in a large group, you can extend the times)

1) Drink, bite to eat, chat	(10 mins)
2) A Bible reading	(2 mins)
3) A Bible study	
a. Any questions? (Whether answer is known or not!) (2 mins)	
(Don't answer any, till all questions noted!)	
b. Any relevant cross references? (2 mins)	
c. Discussion of answers (13 mins)	
d. Conclusion (10 mins)	
i. A Key verse and Main Point?	
ii. What does it show about God / Jesus?	
iii. What should I do?	
4) Sharing (Trials and joys – family, work, self)	(5 mins)
5) Prayer	(1 min)

Remember!

As we gather round God's Word

- a) Listen to the views of others.
- b) Make room for the novice. They can join in too when you start by listing 'Any questions'

- c) Don't let the 'knowledgeable' dominate. Encourage everyone to think for themselves.
- d) Try to include others, especially, 'seekers' in your sharing together.

* The **process** is explained and practised in a four-hour course, suitable for all, called *Introduction to Hearing the Word*. Email: office@tpc.org.uk

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To show that the Bible is accessible to all,
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