

HEARING THE WORD



NIGEL BARGE

Ruth
Leader's Guide

Hearing the Word Ruth Leader's Guide

Web Edition

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Nigel Barge, July 2026

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Resources

The New Bible Dictionary 3rd edition published by Inter Varsity Press

The New Bible Commentary 21st century edition, IVP. A commentary on every Bible book

www.blueletterbible.org

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Hearing the Word: A Tool for Bible reading

Here is a pattern you may use to study a passage of the Bible. It helps if you then write down your own questions and answers in a notebook.



LOOK – What does it *say*?

The Text

What questions does it raise -

- *Who, What, When, Where, Why, how?*

What surprises you?

The Context?

the surrounding text

the Book of the Bible

the whole Bible

the place in the Bible Story



LEARN – What does it *mean*?

What type of writing is it?

Answer the questions

Summarise the passage



LISTEN – What is the *message*?

Which is the **Main Point**?

Which is the **Key Verse**?



LIVE – What is the *response*?

What does it show *about God*, (character, grace*, Jesus**)?

from the **KV / MP** ?

from the rest of the passage?

What should be done,

from the **KV / MP**, by original hearers /me, today?

from the rest of the passage?

* God's undeserved generosity is evident throughout the Bible; 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).

Sharing the Word

After carefully reading a passage of the Bible, and using the HtW Tool (p4) yourself, here is a pattern you might use *to share your thoughts with others*.

Preparing for a group

Time put in beforehand will *greatly benefit* time together.

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

Write down your thoughts.

Format

- LOOK } **Go verse by verse** – Invite **short, direct** questions –
(Who, What, When, Where, Why, hoW?)
& } whether answers known or not. Answer each in turn.
Look for other Bible parts that might be relevant
LEARN } Pay attention to anything that puzzles,
LISTEN – Share views on the Main Point and a Key Verse.
LIVE – Respond
What does it show of God / His grace/Jesus
What should be done, by first hearers/by me, today?
NB Be sure to leave **adequate time** for the **LIVE** section..

Operation

As you gather round God's Word together:

- listen to the views of others.
- welcome new people. (All can join in when you start with simple questions, whether you know the answer or not.)
- encourage people to think for themselves. (Don't let the knowledgeable dominate or rehearse sermons past!)
- include all who might wish to, in your sharing together.

Growth

The goal is to **Share** the Word. Discuss soon who might join you, particularly those outwith the church. When your group grows to about 5, plan to divide. (see: Sharing the Word – 'Meristems').

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 movie, 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

The book contains no clue to its author.

Historical setting

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

After Moses' death, **Joshua** became the leader and led the people in the conquest of Canaan (c.1230BC). When 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) Unlike our present meaning, the word 'Judge' is used of people who were rulers in peace time, and leaders in battle. The final line of Judges says: "*In those days, Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit.*" (21:25)

The book of **Ruth** is set within this period (1:1) – when Israel was disobedient, selfish and idolatrous. If the famine (1:1) was a judgment from God on the land, it might have been in response to this disobedience. Elimelech's move to Moab may have seemed right to him at the time – but it did not avert calamity.

Moab

Abraham had a nephew, Lot. Lot had a son, Moab, by one of his own daughters (Genesis 19:30-38). The Moabites were related to, but *not of the line of*, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the people of the Promise. They worshipped the god Chemish. Moab was 'next door' to Judah, east of the Dead Sea, which is about 10 miles wide. Perhaps Elimelech travelled only 50 to 100 miles to escape the famine.

Date of writing

Leon Morris writes, "In view of the lack of firm evidence, it is impossible to be dogmatic. But the language, the acquaintance with early customs, and the general atmosphere of the book seem to show that a date during the early reign of the Kings probably best satisfies the conditions. It is difficult to be more precise." (Tyndale Old Testament, Commentaries: Judges and Ruth, 1968)

Its purpose

Why was this beautiful love story recognised as part of Scripture? Primarily it shows how God is active throughout it, and through the whole Bible story.

At the time, it provided a family tree for King David, the greatest of the Hebrew kings, which does not appear in the books of Samuel. (4:17ff). Looking through a New Testament lens, however, Christians also see it as part of the ancestry of Jesus, great David's Greater Son. It shows us God's divine purpose of redemption in the world, involving Ruth, a Moabitess – an outsider – in the line of promise which stretches from Adam to Christ.

Study 1

Ruth 1:1-22

Be wholehearted for God and His people

Background

Palestine has a rather uncertain rainfall, so times of drought are not uncommon. (see *famine* below). 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 land God had promised to Abraham
	<i>sojourn</i> (ESV)	live for a while (NIV,) <i>ie</i> Elimelech planned to return
	<i>Bethlehem</i>	<i>lit</i> 'house of bread' <i>ie</i> granary
2	<i>Elimelech</i>	means, God is King or 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>Fields of Moab</i> (ESV)	just means <i>the country of Moab</i> (NIV: <i>Moab</i>)
	<i>visited</i>	word used in OT to describe divine activity
8, 21, 22	<i>the LORD</i>	YAHWEH, the personal name of the God of Israel
	<i>kindness</i>	incudes thought of faithfulness, steadfastness
1, 9	<i>wept aloud</i>	the traditional Eastern expression of grief
13	<i>God's hand</i>	a way of speaking of God's activity
15	<i>her people</i>	<i>ie</i> her nation, Moab
20	<i>Mara</i>	means bitter
	<i>Almighty</i>	Hebrew <i>Shaddai</i> ; emphasis is on God's great power, sometimes including severity of God <i>eg</i> Is. 13:6 Joel 1:15
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; 2 Samuel 21:1, 1 Kings 18:2, 2 Kings 6:25
11	<i>levirate marriage</i>	<i>see</i> Deuteronomy 25:5ff; Genesis 38:5-10
20	<i>bitter water</i>	<i>see</i> Exodus 15:22-27
21	<i>Almighty</i>	<i>see</i> Genesis 17:1; 35:11; Exodus 6:3, Psalm 68:14, 91:1ff

LOOK What does it *say*?

1) The Text

What questions does the passage raise?

- 1 *Why was there a famine in the land?*
Why did the man of Judah leave Israel?
Why did he go to Moab?
- 2 *Why does it tell us again that they were from Bethlehem, and Ephrathites?*
- 4 *Why did they take Moabite wives?*
- 5 *What is the significance of 10 years?*
- 6 *What was her motive for going back?*
- 8 *Why did Naomi advise her daughters to return to their mother's house?*
- 9 *Why did they weep together when Naomi sent them home?*
- 11 *Why did Naomi cite her having no more children as a reason for sending them home?*
- 13 *How did she know the hand of the Lord had gone out against her?*
- 15 *Why was Naomi sending her back to 'her own gods'?*
- 16 *Why did Ruth say, 'Do not urge me...'?*
- 17 *What did Ruth mean by this oath?*
- 18 *Why did Naomi agree to her coming back to Judah with her?*
- 19 *Why was the 'whole town stirred because of them'?*
- 20 *Why had the Lord 'dealt with her bitterly'?*
- 21 *Why 'empty' – what about Ruth?*
- 22 *What is the significance of the barley harvest?*

What surprises or confuses you?

- 6 *Why did she start out on her return with her daughters-in-law and then send them back?*

2) The Context

What other parts of the Bible might help you understand this passage?

Whole Bible

- 1 *Famine (Deuteronomy 28:15,22).*
Jesus is the bread of life. (John 6:35)
Moab (Genesis 19:37).
Submit yourselves to God (James 4:7).
- 2 *'Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah' (Micah 5:2; Matthew 2:5,6).*

- 4 Abraham wanted his son to have a wife from his own kindred (Gen 24:4). Intermarrying with Canaanites was not permitted (Deut. 7:3). There is no explicit prohibition against marrying Moabites, though their 'admission to the congregation' was prohibited. (Deuteronomy. 23:3)
cf Matthew 1:3-7, 16 with Tamar + Perez (Genesis 35), Rahab mother of Boaz, (Joshua 2), Bathsheba + Solomon (1 Samuel 11:1ff; 12:24).
- 6 The Lord gives rest to those He loves. (Psalm 127:2)
When he came to his senses ... 'I will arise and go to my Father...' (Luke 15:17,18)
- 8 'Father forgive them, for they do not know what they do.' (Luke 23:34)
- 12 Levirate marriage – bearing a son for a dead brother (Deuteronomy 25:5)
- 13 The cost of discipleship (Matthew 10:37-39; Luke 14:25-33)
I know the plans I have for you – plans for welfare not for evil (Jer. 29:11)
- 15 You shall have no other gods before me (Deuteronomy 5:7)
Hear O Israel: The Lord our God is one (Deuteronomy 6:4)
- 16 Come to me all who labour ... and I will give you rest. (Matthew 11:28)
- 17 It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. (Gal 2:20)
- 21 'Calamity', cf. Job (in all this, Job did not sin or charge God with wrong. (Job 1:22) Curse God and die? Shall we not receive good from God and shall we not receive evil (Job 2:9,10)
- 22b At the beginning of barley harvest – 'at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly' (Romans 5:6).

Bible story

After God created a man, the man sinned and so death entered humanity.
God's Law had been given but human beings were and are unable to keep it.
A Saviour is promised, and Ruth would be part of His family line.

LEARN What does it *mean*?

- 1) How do you answer the questions the passage raises?
 - 1 Perhaps the famine was because the people had disobeyed God.
He left Israel to find food for his family, but maybe he was disobeying God.
Moab were 'relatives' and had not been hostile to the Israelites as they headed for the promised land.
 - 2 It emphasises Bethlehem and Ephrathites are a very important part of the story and its implications.

- 4 They took Moabite wives as they were disobeying the Lord?
- 5 Ten is the complete Hebrew number.
- 6 Her motive for return was she heard the Lord had provided food again.
- 8 Though it might seem considerate, she was condemning the girls to be removed from the Lord, the God of Israel.
- 9 They wept as they were truly family and were grieved at parting.
- 11 If Naomi had had another son, it would have been his responsibility by the Law of Levirate marriage to take his brother's wife and have a son for him.
- 13 She knew because of the 'failure' of her flight to Moab.
- 15 She was sending her back to 'her own gods', assuming Orpah would worship Chemish.
- 16 Ruth said this as she believed in the God of Israel.
- 17 Ruth's oath conveys her commitment to Naomi and Naomi's God.
- 18 Naomi agreed, as Ruth was choosing to do the right thing.
- 19 The whole town was stirred because she had come back after so long.
- 20 Naomi felt the Lord had 'dealt with her bitterly' because of her disobedience in leaving the promised land.
- 21 'Empty,' meaning 'no wealth', but also seems to imply she did not at that time count Ruth as a blessing.
- 22 It indicates the time of year: barley harvest was at the end of April

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

- 6 As she got nearer Israel, the implication of appearing back with two foreign family members started to weigh on her

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

To avoid a famine, Elimelech, his wife Naomi and their sons, Mahlon and Chilion, left Bethlehem in Judah and went to Moab. Elimelech died. The sons married Moabite women, Ruth and Orpah. By the time they had lived there for about ten years, both sons had died as well. (1-5)

Hearing of plenty back in Israel, Naomi left with her daughters-in-law. On the way, she tried to send them back to Moab. The girls were reluctant to leave her, but Naomi tried hard to convince them. Orpah did go home, but Ruth 'dug in her heels'. (6-14)

Ruth was determined to remain with Naomi and serve the God of Israel. Naomi stopped urging her to go back. (15-18)

Naomi entered her hometown, humiliated by her time in Moab and accompanied by her Moabite daughter-in-law, Ruth. (19-22)

LISTEN What is the *message*?

1) What is the lesson or the main point?

Commitment to God means commitment to His people as well.

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

16c

Your people shall be my people and your God, my God.

LIVE - What is the *response*?

1) What does it show about God (character, grace, Jesus)?

from the **KV / MP**

16 God will accept people from anywhere who come to Him.

from the rest of the passage

2 Jesus, the King, God Himself, was born in Bethlehem – an Ephrathite.

6 The Lord gives his people food.

22 The Lord's timing is perfect.

2) What should be done?

from the **Key Verse**, by original hearers/me, today?

16, 17b Commit yourself to the Lord and His people, whole-heartedly

from the rest of the passage?

1 Be very careful not to try to avoid the Lord's call.

2 Note: Be careful not to move out of God's provision for you for what seems at the time to be 'good reasons'.

6 Be prepared to return to the Lord.

2 Unlike Naomi, "Count your blessings, name them one by one."

Study 2

Ruth 2:1-23

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) Instead, 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.

Kinsman-redeemer. In Leviticus, family relationship involves a variety of 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 dead man and carry on his name. This was 'levirate' marriage.

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> | ie 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) used only once elsewhere, by Jephthah in Judges 11:35 |
| 23 | <i>wheat harvest</i> | After the barley harvest (1:22). From the beginning of barley harvest to end of wheat harvest is about 2 months. |

Bible Connections

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

LOOK What does it *say*?

1) The Text

What questions does the passage raise?

- 1 *What is a 'worthy' man?*
- 2 *Why is she still called 'Ruth the Moabitess'?*
What does she mean by 'after him in whose eyes I find favour'?
Why didn't Naomi go too?
- 3 *Why does it repeat – who was 'of the clan of Elimelech'?*
- 4 *Why does it say, 'came from Bethlehem'?*
What does the writer mean by including this greeting?
- 5 *What did he mean by, 'Whose young woman is this'?*
- 6 *Why again include 'Moabite ...from Moab'?*
- 7 *What does Ruth's manner in asking and working demonstrate?*
- 8 *What did he mean by calling Ruth 'my daughter'?*
What did Boaz's attention suggest?
- 10 *Why did she fall on her face, bowing to the ground?*
- 12 *What would 'a full reward'(ESV) be?*
- 14 *What did, 'Come here and eat some bread and dip your morsel into the wine' mean?*
Why 'roasted grain'?
- 19 *Why did Naomi 'bless the man that took notice' of her?*
- 22 *Why does the writer remind us that she was her daughter-in-law?*
Why the sudden concern for Ruth's well-being? cf vs 2!
- 23 *What does it mean 'and she lived with her mother-in-law'?*

What surprises or confuses you?

- 2 *Why did Ruth so demean herself and so willingly?*

2) The Context

Surrounding passage

Individual book

- 1 *worthy – Ruth (3:11)*
- 12 *spread your wings over your servant, for you are a redeemer (3:9)*

whole Bible

- 1 Worthy to be praised (Psalm 18:3)
- 4 The Lord bless you (Numbers 6:24) (unusual phrase in OT)
- 8,9 The fields are white unto harvest (John 4:35)
- 9 If anyone thirst, let him come to me and drink (John 7:37)
- 10 falling on their faces before a king (1 Samuel 25:23; 2 Samuel 14:4)
- 11 cf Abraham leaving Ur of the Chaldees (Genesis 11:31 – 12:4)
- 12 100 times in this time ... and in the age to come, eternal life. (Mark 10:30)
Under his wings you will find refuge (Psalm 91:4)
- 14 Jesus invites us to eat and drink (Matthew 26:26-28)
She had some left over, cf feeding of 5000 (Luke 9:17)
- 23 Submit yourself to one another out of reverence for Christ (Ephesians 5:21)

Bible story

*After God created a man, the man sinned and so death entered humanity.
God's Law had been given but human beings were and are unable to keep it.
A Saviour is promised, and Ruth would be part of His family line.*

LEARN What does it *mean*?

- 1) How do you answer the questions the passage raises?
 - 1 A 'worthy' man is an upright man of moral integrity.
 - 2 'The Moabite' reminds us Ruth is not of God's chosen people, Israel
It means she is dependent on someone for charity.
Naomi was not prepared to lower herself
 - 3 'of the clan of Elimelech' underlines that unbeknown to either of them, Boaz was a relative.
 - 4 'Came...' simply means he travelled from the town to the field.
The greeting underlines he is a holy man who shows respect / affection to his workers, and receives it from them.
 - 5 He expected her to belong to a household?
 - 6 'Moabite ...from Moab' shows everyone knew her and her origins.
 - 7 Ruth's manner shows she was humble and hard working.

- 8 To call Ruth 'my daughter' meant he assumed responsibility for her.
Boaz's attention suggests honour, generosity, and maybe romance!
- 10 She bowed down in gratitude and relief, acknowledging this man's kindness.
- 12 'A full reward' would be what she had given up – husband, family, security...
- 14 This meant – I fancy you! (It was way above normal generosity to the poor).
'Roasted grain' was fine food.
- 19 Naomi blessed the man for the great extent of his kindness.
- 22 It reminds us she was her daughter-in-law because she was in authority over her?
The sudden concern for Ruth was that she saw it was the opportunity for both of them.
- 23 It means she lived under her authority.

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

Ruth demeaned herself so willingly because they were desperately poor.

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

Naomi had a relative on her husband's side whose name was Boaz. Ruth happened to glean in Boaz' field. Boaz noticed her and was told that she was the Moabitess who had come back with Naomi (1-7).

Boaz treated Ruth with special kindness. When Ruth questioned this, he called down the Lord's blessing upon her for her devotion to the Lord and her mother-in-law. Ruth gratefully acknowledged his favour to her (8-13).

Boaz showed special favour to her at mealtimes and in the fields (14-16).

Naomi noticed the very surprising 'fruit' she brought back and concluded something special had happened. Ruth told her of Boaz, and Naomi noted that he was a close relative / a redeemer.

When Naomi was told of his ongoing provision for Ruth, she recognised her chance and told Ruth to stick close to Boaz. She obeyed and did so to the very end of harvest time. (17-23)

LISTEN What is the *message*?

1) What is the lesson or the main point?

Faith in the Lord for your whole life is rewarded by Him.

2) Which verse best sums up the message of the passage? **v12**

'The Lord repay you for what you have done, and a full reward be given you by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge'

LIVE– What is the *response*?

What does it show about God, (character, grace, Jesus)?

from the **KV / MP** ?

12 *God rewards the faithful.*

from the rest of the passage?

1 *God is worthy – He alone declares who is worthy.*

3 *God's providence just 'happens'!*

10 *The wonder of God's grace*

14 *Jesus invites us to eat the bread and wine. (Matthew 26:26-28)*

What should be done ?

from the **Key Verse**, by original hearers/by me today?

12 *Expect the Lord to reward faith in Him with blessing.*

from the rest of the passage

1 *Volunteer for service.*

Be prepared to do the most menial of work.

10 *Bow down and acknowledge God's grace in our lives*

23 *Live under the authority that God has set over us.*

Ruth and Boaz at the threshing floor

Background

We have very little knowledge of customs prevalent in Israel in antiquity. We do not know if the way it was done here was a widely practised custom or not.

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 see him and steal his crop, Judges 6:11.)

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

v10-11 indicate Ruth had become well known in the town and gained a good reputation.

Kinsman-redeemer. See Background in Study 2

Word list

- 1 *home* (NIV) / *rest* (ESV) has sense of “settled in life”
- 2 *tonight* probably evening
- 3 *wash* probably bathe oneself
- Perfume* (NIV) / *anoint* (ESV) similar meaning
- best clothes* (NIV) / *cloak* (ESV) probably a large cloak to cover her
- 7 *quietly* (NIV) / *softly* (ESV) not secretly but ‘so as not to be heard’
- 9 *corner of your garment* (NIV) / *wings* (ESV) can mean both, but more commonly used for wings cf 2:12
- 15 *measure* particular measure not stated, obviously substantial
- He went* (NIV) probably scribal error, clearly means *she went* as in ESV

Bible connections

- 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 (Genesis 2:1-3)

LOOK

1) The Text

What questions does the passage raise?

- 1 *Why does it remind us that she was Ruth's mother-in-law?*
Why now should Naomi seek a home/rest for Ruth?
- 3 *Why should she wash and anoint herself?*
Why not make herself known till they have finished eating and drinking?
- 4 *Why uncover his feet?*
How does she know that he will tell her what to do?
- 5 *Why did she say, 'All that you say I will do'?*
- 6 *Why 'as mother-in-law had commanded her'?*
- 7 *What did it mean that 'his heart was merry' (ESV)/ 'in good spirits' (NIV)?*
Why did she come softly (ESV)/ quietly (NIV) ?
- 9 *What did 'spread your wings over me' mean?*
What does he mean by calling her 'my daughter'?
- 10 *What was this last kindness and what was the first one?*
- 11 *Why should she fear?*
How did he know what all his fellow townsmen thought?
- 13 *Why remain tonight — until morning?*
- 14 *Why lay at his feet?*
Why did she leave in secret?
- 15 *Why six measures of flour?*
- 16 *Why did she ask Ruth?*
- 17 *Why should she not go back to her mother-in-law empty handed?*
- 18 *What did she mean by "wait my daughter, until you learn how the matter turns out, for the man will not rest but will settle the matter today".*

What surprises or confuses you?

- 3 *Why did Ruth take the risk and obey her mother-in-law's commands?*

2) The Context

surrounding passage,

- 2 *Boaz a close relative – redeemer (2:20)*
- 9 *Spread your wings (2:12)*
- 10 *May you be blessed by the Lord (2:4,12)*

individual book,

- 10 *Her first kindness had been to leave her father/ mother/ native land (2:11)*
- 11 *Worthy woman cf Boaz (2:1)*
- 17 *Empty handed cf (1:21)*

whole Bible,

- 1 *‘My daughter’ very unusual address. Used elsewhere in OT only by Jephthah (Judges 11:35) but in Ruth, eight times (2:2,8,22; 3:1,10,11,16,18).*
- 3 *Anoint (ESV) yourself - Context shows perfume is the meaning (cf same very unusual usage of anoint in 2 Sam 14:2)*
- 7 *‘Merry’ – tipsy or drunk (1Sa 25:36)*
- 12 *Redeemer – cf Jesus (Gal 4:5; Tit 2:14)*
- 14 *Abstain from all appearance of evil (KJV) (1Thess 5:22)*
- 18 *He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Christ Jesus (Philippians 1:8)*

Bible story

*After God created a man, the man sinned and so death entered humanity.
God’s Law had been given but human beings were and are unable to keep it.
A Saviour is promised, and Ruth would be part of His family line.*

LEARN

- 1) How do you answer the questions the passage raises?
 - 1 *It reminds us of the authority in the relationship.
Naomi wants to see Ruth (and herself!) settled in life and provided for.*
 - 3 *Naomi was hoping for physical attraction.
After eating and drinking, Boaz should be in a good humour.*
 - 4 *Uncover his feet to awaken him
She knows he is ‘worthy’ (2:1) and that he has fallen in love with Ruth.*
 - 5 *Ruth agreed because she accepted her mother-in-law’s authority.*

- 6 *She was simply following her instructions.*
- 7 *Merry / good spirits meant he was ‘tipsy’?*
 She did not want to wake him or others.
- 9 *‘Spread your wings over me’ was a proposal of marriage.*
 ‘My daughter’ was a recognition of their family bond and his care for her.
- 10 *The first one was coming back with her mother-in-law and gleaning for them both. The second one was being willing to marry Boaz for the benefit of her mother-in-law’s family line.*
- 11 *He was assuring her he would do all that she asked.*
 He must have known because her good reputation had spread.
- 13 *Remain for her own safety*
- 14 *She lay at his feet meaning there was no ‘hanky panky’!*
 She left in secret for modesty’s sake.
- 15 *Six was one short of the perfect seven – it was a type not the real one.*
- 16 *She asked Ruth as she had been eagerly waiting for news.*
- 17 *Not empty handed gave proof of his good intentions.*
- 18 *She perceived that she had ‘caught this fish’!*
 She saw his eagerness to marry Ruth.

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

Ruth obeyed her mother-in-law as it was lawful.

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

Naomi, for Ruth’s ‘own good’, sets her up with Boaz. She instructs her to go to the threshing floor and when he is asleep to gently waken him and then to obey him. Ruth agreed. (1-7)

Boaz retired after eating and drinking and fell asleep. At midnight he awoke with a start and discovered a woman, Ruth, who ‘proposed’ to him. He was amazed that she should have chosen him for her mother-in-law’s sake. He told her to stay. He informed her of a closer redeemer and agreed to redeem her if he would not. (8-13) Without anything improper happening, Ruth slipped away in the early morning, being given six measures of barley. Naomi waited and was told that this gift was to ensure ‘she didn’t go back empty handed’. Naomi concluded he would act that day. (14-18)

LISTEN What is the *message*?

1) What is the lesson or the main point?

We choose to invite the Lord to graciously redeem us.

2) Which verse best sums up the message of the passage? **9b**

Spread your wings over your servant, for you are a redeemer.

LIVE– What is the *response*?

What does it show about God, (character, grace, Jesus)?

from the **KV / MP** ?

9 *The redeemer, Jesus, responds to the appeal.*

from the rest of the passage?

2,3 *The Lord puts up with our scheming for the sake of His (yet to be born!) Son.*

10 *The Lord rewards kindness.*

13 *The Lord lives!*

What should be done ?

from the **Key Verse** by original hearers/me today?

9 *Cast ourselves on Jesus' mercy and protection.*

from the other verses

1 *Be aware of concealing our desires beneath altruistic motives.*

5 *Obey authority willingly, as long as it is within the law (?)*

10 *Give the Lord's blessing to those who honour him.*

13 *Do things right in God's eyes and the outcome will be 'good'.*

Act consciously in the sight of God.

14 *Be circumspect in all your dealing to avoid giving the wrong impression.*

18 *Trust in the Lord to finish His good work.*

Boaz marries Ruth

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, it was where people gathered socially.

If a man died childless and his brother refused to marry the widow, 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* particular transaction happened not at the city gate, but in the courtyard of the guard of the royal palace (Jeremiah 32:2) since Jeremiah was imprisoned there!)

The genealogy at the end of the chapter covers about 640 years but only has ten names so it is likely the list is somewhat compressed with some names omitted.

Word List

- | | | |
|----|---|---|
| 1 | <i>town gate</i> | see above |
| | <i>‘friend’</i> | unique in OT to call another ‘friend’ |
| | <i>Come over here</i> (NIV)/ <i>Turn aside</i> (ESV) | He wants a serious conversation |
| 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 |
| 5 | <i>acquire</i> | The dead man’s widow is part of the redemption: her son would eventually inherit the field. |
| 11 | <i>Rachel and Leah</i> | Wives of Jacob, mothers of his 12 sons <i>see</i> Gen 29:14-28 |
| | <i>have standing</i> (NIV)/ <i>act worthily</i> (ESV) | Very unusual word. Same root as worthy (2:1; 3:11), general excellence, wealth |
| 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 *Blessed be the Lord* Usual way of expressing thankfulness
- 17 *Obed* Means ‘servant’; vv18-22 show him to be the grandfather of David, Israel’s greatest earthly king
- 20 *Salmon* 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

LOOK

1) The Text

- 1 *Why did Boaz go to the gate?*
Why ‘and behold’ (ESV) ?
Why is he called ‘the redeemer’ and not his name as well?
Why does Boaz call him ‘friend’?
What did he mean ‘turn aside’?
- 2 *Why ten men?*
Why the stress on ‘sitting down’?
- 3 *Why did he start by speaking about the opportunity of the land and not the obligation as a redeemer to Naomi?*
- 6 *How would he impair his own inheritance?*
- 10 *Why does he say he would ‘acquire’ Ruth as well?*
Why ‘from the gate of his native place’?
- 11 *How did Rachel and Leah ‘build up the house of Israel’?*
Who is to be ‘renowned’?
- 12 *What was it about Perez’s house that Boaz’s house and offspring should be like?*
- 13 *Why does it say, the Lord gave her conception?*
- 14 *Why does the focus shift from Boaz and Ruth to Naomi?*
Who is this redeemer? (Why is he not mentioned by name?)
- 15 *How do they know her daughter-in-law loves her?*
Why seven sons?
- 17 *Why did the women give the child his name and not Boaz?*
- 18 *What does this lineage here show?*

What surprises or confuses you?

Why does the story end with Nomi, and not Ruth and Boaz?

2) The Context

surrounding passage

4:1 sat down (Luke 4:5)

And behold, the redeemer came by – cf (Ruth) happened to come to a field belonging to Boaz.

individual book

11 *Worthily cf Boaz (2:3;) Ruth (3:11)*

14,15 *cf Naomi's bitter outburst 1:20,21*

whole Bible

1 *I have no longer called you servants but friends (John 15:15)*

2 *ten elders cf 10 years in Moab (1:4)*

6 *Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him and he will make straight your paths (Prov 3:5,6)*

10 *witnesses give evidence (Dt 17:6,7; 19:15)*

Bought – the redemption of the purchased possession (Eph 1:14)

You are not your own, for you were bought with a price (1 Cor 6:19)

12 *Tamar bore Judah (Gen 38)*

13 *..those who honour me, I will honour ... (cf 1:16; 1 Sam 2:30)*

15 *sons of one's youth. Blessed is the man who fills his quiver with them (Ps 127:4,5)*

17 *Naomi recipient of grace (Eph 2:1-10)*

Bible story

After God created a man, the man sinned and so death entered humanity.

God's Law had been given but human beings were and are unable to keep it.

A Saviour is promised, and Ruth would be part of His family line.

LEARN

- 1) How do you answer the questions the passage raises?
 - 1 *The gate was the meeting place to find the redeemer and settle the matter. 'and behold' cf 'it just so happened' ie God brought it about. His name is of no consequence to the story; his only importance is he was 'the redeemer' (see 3:12-13) Boaz calls him 'friend' as he wanted the best for this man; he wasn't trying to pull 'a fly one'. 'Turn aside' meant have a conversation – 'I have something serious to say.'*
 - 2 *Ten men, no significance known. (In later years ten was requirement for eg a synagogue service) Sitting down = official, they were performing an act of judgment.*
 - 3 *He started with the thing that would interest the redeemer.*
 - 6 *Buying the field impaired his own inheritance because it would then be inherited by 'Mahlon's' son.*
 - 10 *The widow Ruth was part of the redemption: in accepting the position of 'redeemer' and buying Elimelech's field, he undertook to have a child by Ruth for Elimelech / Mahlon. 'gate of his native place' was his home community, the town records (NIV)*
 - 11 *Rachel and Leah "built up the house of Israel" by having 12 sons. Boaz's name is to be renowned.*
 - 12 *Perez' house, though of questionable heritage, was at the centre of God's plan – like Boaz's line of Rahab the harlot.*
 - 13 *The Lord gave her conception' because the child was part of God's plan.*
 - 14 *The focus shifts back to Naomi as a contrast to her conclusion in 1:20f that everything had been a disaster for her. Reading v14,15 together, the new baby is the redeemer, Naomi's hope for the future. His name is not mentioned because he has not yet been given it.*
 - 15 *They know her daughter-in-law loves her by her care and devotion. A son is desired for inheritance. Seven is the perfect number. Shows how Ruth is infinitely to be prized.*

17 The women gave him the name Obed (meaning servant) as they recognised he was 'serving' God's purposes.

17-22 This lineage shows that these verses at least were written during or after the reign of King David.

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

4:17 Naomi is the one we are to identify with, in her going from 'bitter' resignation to manipulative scheming to receiving unmerited blessing.

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

Boaz went to the city gate hoping to see the redeemer. He saw him and officially told him he was first in line to buy Elimelech's field from Naomi. At first he chose to do so, till Boaz told him he would also therefore have to marry Ruth the Moabite to carry on Elimelech's line. This then made him refuse. (1-6)

Before witnesses, he withdrew and Boaz bought the field and Ruth, committing himself to perpetuate Elimelech's name. (7-10)

The witnesses blessed him that he might act worthily and that his house would grow at the heart of God's purposes. (11,12)

Boaz and Ruth had a son. The women thanked God that Naomi had been given a child who would be a redeemer. Naomi nursed the child and the women named him Obed. (13-17)

Obed lay in the line from Perez to King David. (18-22)

LISTEN What is the *message*?

1) What is the lesson or the main point?

God has redeemed the disobedient in Israel by His son, named Jesus.

2) Which verse best sums up the message of the passage? (14)

"Blessed be the LORD, who has not left you this day without a redeemer, and may his name be renowned in Israel! (14)

LIVE– What is the *response*?

What does it show about God, (character, grace, Jesus)?

from the **KV / MP** ?

14 The Lord, our redeemer, is worthy of our praise.

Jesus is our redeemer Ephesians 1:7; Romans 3:24f; Galatians 3:13; 5:1

from the rest of the passage?

12,13 The Lord gives offspring.

12,17 God includes ‘unworthy’ (Tamar) and outsiders (Ruth) in his family

16 The Lord gives us His heart’s desire!

What should be done ?

from the **Key Verse**, by original hearers/me, today?

14 Marvel at the grace of God to sinners in Jesus

from the rest of the passage?

1 Wait on the Lord’s timing, opportunity

2 If someone is in competition with you, look for the best in them (‘friend’).

3,4 Do not try and ‘stack the deck’!

6 Wait on God to order your ways.

7-10 Do things according to the Law – by the book!

11 Witness to the fulfilment of the Word of God.

12 Nothing in your background precludes you from the service of God.

18 Note the ongoing purposes of God – generation to generation.

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