

The BOOK of RUTH

In a year like 2020, many people – including many of us – are probably asking questions like: what is God doing? If God is in control, why is there a global pandemic? Why are so many people dying? On one hand, this is a global issue. Yet, it also affects so many people on a personal level. The book of Ruth follows the story of one family, living in a time of drought and famine, but also living with the personal impact of grief and loss, which led to them experiencing extreme poverty.

Earlier this year, a number of us joined a Leadership Conversations webinar, hosted by NSW ACT Baptist Churches. We were challenged to encourage a posture of curiosity, where people can openly ask questions and verbalise their doubts. It is not necessary for us, as Christians, to feel that we need to have all the answers. God can handle it when we verbalise that we feel pain, grief and loss – and even that God has seemingly dealt us a bad hand. We can ask: what is God doing here? And we can wonder: what will the longer-term outcome be, as a result of the things that are happening in our world and in our lives?

GETTING STARTED: In Ruth 1:20-21, we read words of Naomi, where she acknowledges the sovereignty of God in her life, yet also that “the Almighty has dealt bitterly with me ... the LORD has brought me back empty ... the LORD has dealt harshly with me ... the Almighty has brought calamity upon me”. Often, as Christians, we are uncomfortable when people are dealing with tough times and blame God for the things that are happening. It is sometimes like there is a ‘no go’ zone, where we shouldn’t doubt or question. However, this can lead to people feeling like they can’t be ‘real’ about where they are at. For some, that leads to cynicism about the church, especially when other people are not willing to journey with them.

🗨️ How comfortable are you, as a life group, with people expressing their doubts and concerns about faith? How comfortable are you, to verbalise your own questions?

👁️ **Watch** the clip: Stay Curious - How Questions and Doubts Can Save Your Faith (2:10 min)
<https://youtu.be/xhrSI9NpQQM>

🗨️ How might asking each other questions be helpful in journeying with each other through the seasons of life, including wilderness seasons? Do we need to have answers for each other’s questions and doubts? Is it helpful to give ‘pat’ answers to each other?

READ: RUTH 1:1-22

🗨️ What did you notice/ what things stood out, as you just read the passage?

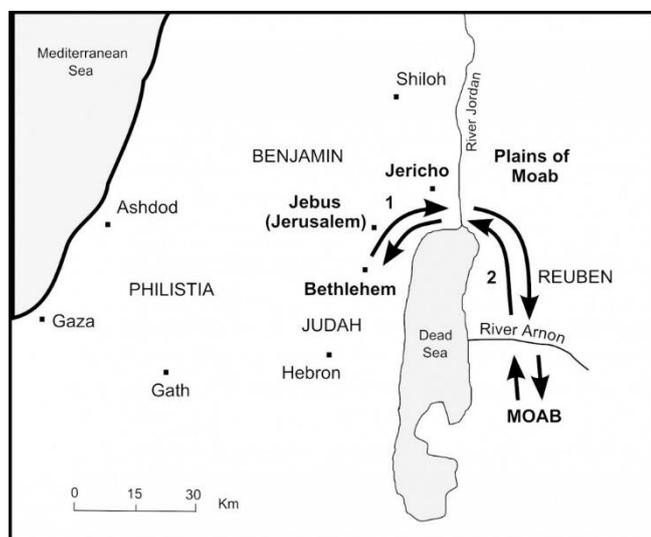
🗨️ What things did you take away from the sermon this week?

👁️ As we get started on this four week series, it is worthwhile if we get an overview of this book and the story as a whole. Attached is the poster that goes with this Bible Project Overview.¹

Watch: Bible Project Overview: Ruth (7:11 min)

<https://youtu.be/0h1eoBeR4Jk>

🗨️ What things did you note, as you watched this video? What key words stood out? Neither Naomi or Ruth knew how their lives would turn out. What did you learn about the ‘big picture’ of the book?



🗨️ Ruth 1:1-5 sets the scene for this story, by telling us a bit about Elimilech, his wife Naomi, and their two sons.

- What was their home town? What other event happened in this town, many centuries later?
- What was happening in the land at the time?
- What decisions did they make?
- What decisions did the sons make?
- What things happened for Naomi, Ruth and Orpah?
- Why did Naomi decide to return home?

¹ <https://open.life.church/items/179244-poster-jpg>

- ① Read and reflect on the following verses. At Mt Sinai, the people had made a covenant with God, that they would worship Yahweh, alone. This meant that they were supposed to keep themselves separate from the pagan worship practices of their neighbours. Yet, in the midst of a famine, this family chose to move to a pagan area. Subsequently, the sons decided to marry Moabite women.

Lev 26:3-4 ³“If you follow my decrees and are careful to obey my commands, ⁴I will send you the seasonal rains. The land will then yield its crops, and the trees of the field will produce their fruit.

Judges 10:6 ⁶Again the Israelites did evil in the LORD’s sight. They served the images of Baal and Ashtoreth, and the gods of Aram, Sidon, Moab, Ammon, and Philistia. They abandoned the LORD and no longer served him at all.

Judges 21:25 ²⁵In those days Israel had no king; all the people did whatever seemed right in their own eyes.

Deut 7:1-4 “When the LORD your God brings you into the land you are about to enter and occupy, he will clear away many nations ahead of you: the Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites. These seven nations are greater and more numerous than you. ²When the LORD your God hands these nations over to you and you conquer them, you must completely destroy them. Make no treaties with them and show them no mercy. ³You must not intermarry with them. Do not let your daughters and sons marry their sons and daughters, ⁴for they will lead your children away from me to worship other gods. Then the anger of the LORD will burn against you, and he will quickly destroy you.

- ☞ When Naomi returned to Bethlehem, she was bitter that her husband and sons had died, plus that she had no grandchildren. Should she have expected God’s blessing and protection from harm, when they had made decisions to disobey commands that God given the Jewish people?

① Steve talked about the Hebrew word *Chesed* being a critical theme in the book of Ruth. In many English Bibles, it is translated “loving kindness”. In the video, it was “loyalty”. Younger comments: “Unfortunately, it is a Hebrew word that no one English word can begin to convey accurately. Being expressive of relationships, the term connotes altogether the notions of covenantal loyalty, faithfulness, kindness, goodness, mercy, love, and compassion ... (1) *Hesed* springs from and is based on relationship, usually some sort of prior relationship. Because of this, it is inherently tied to the concept of covenant (*b^erīt*) and is expressive of the deep and abiding loyalty and commitment between the parties of that covenant. ... (2) it is fundamentally an action. *Hesed* recognizes and acts to relieve an urgent essential need on the part of the recipient. ... (3) It is performed for a situationally weaker person by a situationally more powerful person. ... (4) It is a voluntary act of extraordinary mercy or generosity, a “going beyond the call of duty.”²

- ☞ Some people have made the assumption that when God made covenants with the various patriarchs and with the Hebrew people, that it was akin to a legal contract. However, ‘covenant’ is not the same thing as a ‘contract’. When they sinned, God judged his people and allowed the natural consequences of sinful conduct to run their course. But we also frequently see glimpses of the mercy and compassion of God. God’s grace was also at play. What is one situation, where you have knowingly sinned / disobeyed God, yet you also experienced God’s grace in the midst of that?

① Naomi knew that, if her two (single) Moabite daughters-in-law came with her to Judah, they would most likely be shunned and rejected. They really didn’t have a future, so their best bet was to stay in Moab and to remarry. She told them to stay, releasing them from any obligation they felt to her.

“In human contexts, *hesed* is loving commitment within a relationship, most often, though not exclusively, within the setting of the family or clan. It represents the social bonds of loyalty toward others within the community of God’s people. *Hesed* is mutual: Those who are shown *hesed* are expected, not by law but by social and moral convention, to reciprocate. This has particular implications for the social life of God’s people where *hesed*, expressed in right conduct toward one another, is expected both because of the mutual relationship established through membership of the covenant community and as a proper response to the *hesed* shown by God. Because *hesed* is ultimately voluntary, it is not a legal obligation, though its failure is taken seriously.”³

- ☞ Think about the words of Ruth In Ruth 1:16-17. What do her words tell us, about how her relationship with her mother-in-law? What obligations did she believe she had to Naomi?

FOR REFLECTION: In John Piper’s summary, he notes the following themes in the book of Ruth

1. God’s sovereign rule: God the Almighty rules in all the affairs of humanity
2. God’s mysterious providence: God’s providence is sometimes very hard, but don’t think that your past sin, means you have no hope for the future.
3. God’s good purposes: he works his purposes for the good of his people (Rom 8:28)
4. Freedom like Ruth’s. If you trust in God’s sovereign goodness and mercy, and that he loves to work mightily for those who trust in him, it gives freedom and joy that can’t be shaken by hard times.⁴

- ☞ Which of these things give you comfort? Which of these do you question or struggle with? Why?

² Younger, K. L., Jr. (2002). *Judges and Ruth*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan. p393-394.

³ Younger, K. L., Jr. (2002). *Judges and Ruth*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan. p395.

⁴ <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/ruth-sweet-and-bitter-providence>

CURIOUS FACT: GOD IS HARDY MENTIONED

NAOMI RUTH BOAZ
THE WIDOW THE MOABITE THE FARMER



INTERPLAY OF GOD'S PURPOSE AND HUMAN DECISIONS

TRAGEDY BOYDNESS LOYALTY GENEROSITY LOYALTY

4

RUTH

3

"IN THE DAY THE JUDGES RULED"



1

TRAGEDY & DEATH

MOAB = THE LAND OF

BOAZ =

JOY & BIRTH

DAVID

GENEALOGY
PEZEON
HEZRON
RAUL
AMINADAB
NATHAN
SALMON
BOAZ
JESSE

WHERE YOU GO I WILL GO, YOUR PEOPLE WILL BE MY PEOPLE, AND YOUR GOD WILL BE MY GOD.

CALL ME MARRA (BITTER)

WHERE YOU GO I WILL GO, YOUR PEOPLE WILL BE MY PEOPLE, AND YOUR GOD WILL BE MY GOD.

BOAZ IS OUR KINSMAN REDEEMER!

- CULTURAL PRACTICE
- MARRIES THE WIDOW
- PROTECTS THE FAMILY LINE

MAN OF NOBLE CHARACTER (2:1)

- SHOWS GENEROSITY (SEE DEUTERONOMY 24:19)
- PRAYS THAT GOD WILL BLESS HER

MY GOD REWARD YOU

I MET BOAZ

WOMAN OF NOBLE CHARACTER...YES

WILL YOU REDEEM OUR FAMILY... AND MARRY ME???

GET DRESSED UP

HE SAID YES!!

BOAZ =

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- PRAYS THAT GOD WILL BLESS HER

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JOY & BIRTH

DAVID

GENEALOGY
PEZEON
HEZRON
RAUL
AMINADAB
NATHAN
SALMON
BOAZ
JESSE

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