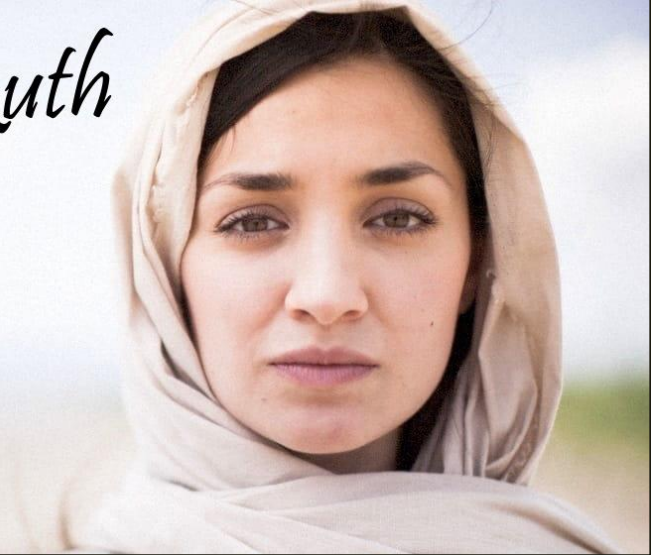


The Book of Ruth

Drawing on a
Deeper Love...



The Book of Ruth in four parts. Ruth chapter 1: Loving in Terrible Times

On the surface, the Old Testament book of Ruth is a simple and very short story about two ordinary Iron Age widows trying to find a way forward in a spiritually decaying culture, and in an agonising, potentially crushing mix of famine, poverty, displacement, migration, sexual threat exclusion, sexism, racism and grief. We know that the events in the book took place between 1200 and 1073 BC, since the opening verse in chapter 1 refers to “the days when the Judges ruled”. It was a time of radical moral and spiritual decline. Time and again Israel rebel against God, bringing disaster and punishment upon themselves until the people repent and cry for help. The pattern repeats – round and round like a vortex spiralling into darkness. Though we can’t be certain, the events in Ruth seem to occur after Gideon and before the time when civil war breaks out after a priest’s concubine is gang-raped to death by a group of Benjaminites. It’s against this grim backdrop that we are invited to focus in chapter 1 on the lives of a few women – normal women struggling with desperate challenges.

Like Ruth, we don’t get to choose the times we are born into or the challenges we will have to face. In such a time as this, can Ruth help us to respond in godly ways to hardship, suffering and loss – financial, relational, physical, emotional or mental?

Read Ruth chapter 1.

Questions for discussion or personal study

1. Think of a time when you or someone close to you faced hardship, suffering or loss. How did you see God at work through that time?
2. Why does Naomi release, and discourage, her daughters-in-law from coming with her to Bethlehem (1:8-13)? What does she want for them?
3. As a Moabite widow, a foreigner, what is Ruth risking by choosing to live in an Israelite community?
4. What does Ruth’s decision and her famous words of commitment (1:16-17) reveal about her character and her priorities?
And what does Ruth’s decision suggest about Naomi’s witness to her over the years?
5. What do Naomi’s words in Moab (1:8-15) and on arriving in Bethlehem (1:20-21) reveal about her character and her emotional and spiritual state?

Going Deeper

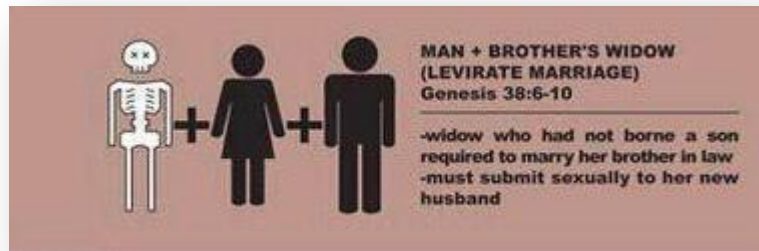
6. Famines occur frequently in the Old Testament. Sometimes it's clear that God is using them to discipline his people (Judges 6:1-6), sometimes they just happen (Genesis 12:1). Compare how, in response to famine, Abraham decides to go down to Egypt (Genesis 12:10); with how his grandson Jacob does (Genesis 45:27-46:4). How might this background help us discern how we are to view Elimelek's decision to move to Moab (1:1)?



Levirate Marriage

When Naomi tells Orpah and Ruth that she is too old to have another son to become one of their husbands, she is referring to the law of Levirate Marriage (Deuteronomy 25:5-10). If a man dies without an heir then his brother has an obligation to marry his widow to ensure there is

a child to carry on the dead man's name. This is still practised in a number of countries today. In contexts where there is no welfare state and no possibility of saving for the equivalent of a pension, the practice not only preserves the name of the deceased but, vitally, ensures that the widow has a child to provide for her in old age.



Living it Out

7. Is there a godly character quality you've noticed in Ruth or Naomi that you'd like to grow into?
8. "In the days when the Judges ruled" (1:1) gives the reader an indication of Israel's culture at the time. How would you describe the culture of your frontline, where you regularly spend time with people who don't know Jesus? What is positive? What is challenging?
9. Is there someone you know to be in crisis? How might you come alongside them?

Prayer Points

- Pray for the specific character quality you want to grow in.
- Is there someone you particularly yearn to hear say the words "Your God will be my God"? Name them before God and pray for their salvation.
- Pray for the person you were thinking about in question 10.