

## Lesson 1

# Introduction of the Book of Ruth

### I. Scripture Reading:

Deuteronomy 11:11-15; Joshua 21:43-45; Judges 2:11-19,  
21:25

### II. Synopsis:

#### 1. Introduction

Around 2000 B.C., the ancestor of the Israelites, Abraham of the Chaldeans, lived in Ur, Mesopotamia. The LORD called for him to leave his country and his family and move to the land that God would show him. God promised Abraham and his descendants the land of

Canaan as an inheritance and that He would make Abraham's descendants into a great nation. Abraham trusted God's promise and set out for the land of Canaan. There, Abraham became the father of Isaac, and Isaac became the father of Jacob, and Jacob became the father of 12 sons, whose descendants would later become the 12 tribes of Israel.

During the days of Jacob, there was a big famine in the land of Canaan, causing Jacob to take his family to Egypt. The Israelites multiplied greatly in the land of Egypt, where they lived about 400 years and were forced into slavery. They cried out to God. When God heard the cry of the children of Israel, He remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and sent Moses to lead the people of Israel out of Egypt.

God performed countless signs and wonders through Moses. The Israelites crossed the Red Sea and wandered in the wilderness for 40 years. God made a covenant with the Israelites at Mount Sinai, where He gave them the Ten Commandments and chose them to become the people of God. He promised the people of Israel that if they loved God and obeyed His commandments, they would be blessed and would inherit Canaan, the Promised Land that flows with milk and honey. However, if the Israelites did not obey the commandments of God and turned to worshipping other gods, they would be cursed.

After the death of Moses, in obedience to God's command, Joshua led the Israelites to cross the Jordan River with courage. Joshua then led the 12 tribes to conquer the cities of Canaan, the land that was given to them by the LORD. They divided up the land based on the results from casting lots. The Bible tells us that the people of Israel settled in their own land. The LORD kept His promises of blessings to the tribes of Israel, and every single one of them came true.

Following the death of Joshua, the LORD raised up judges among the Israelites to lead the people as they lived in the land of Canaan. There were alliances among the tribes, but there were no kings or governmental organizations. As Joshua's generation passed away, there arose another generation, which did not know the LORD or remember the blessings that He had given to the Israelites. This new generation turned away from the LORD God of their fathers, the God who had created the heavens and the earth and the LORD who is in charge of all things, and instead they followed the idol worshiping practice of the local people, serving Baal, Ashtaroth, and other gods. Since the Israelites had forsaken the covenant the LORD had made with them, they provoked Him to anger.

As a result, God delivered them into the hands of their enemies. They were oppressed by foreigners, suffered deeply, and begged God to save them. God, remem-

bering the covenant He had made with their fathers, heard their cries and showed great compassion. He raised up judges to save them from their distress.

However, after their troubles were taken away, the people of Israel repeated their mistakes and, while worshipping other gods, did even more evil than their fathers. They repeatedly rebelled against God and continued to sin against Him, creating a vicious cycle. This was a period of spiritual darkness for the Israelites. There was constant oppression from foreigners, fighting within the tribes, and disasters both natural and man-made. As the Book of Judges states, “All the people did what was right in their own eyes” (Jug 17:6b).

The Book of Ruth takes place during this chaotic period of the judges. The leading characters are women from an ordinary family with two generations of widows. Naomi and her daughter-in-law Ruth experience great misery in life but eventually find happiness.

In this touching story, God’s blessing is manifested through their difficulties, affection, and responsibility. Their ordinary lives thus became extraordinary due to their faith in, and reliance on, God. This wonderful story gives God’s chosen people great hope and encouragement, because even though Naomi and Ruth face a difficult situation and experience suffering both personally and with the entire nation as a whole, the God of Israel

was still taking care of His people, which helped them restore their faith in God.

## 2. Author

According to the Jewish tradition, the books of Ruth, Judges, and 1 & 2 Samuel were all written by Samuel. According to the text in the first verse of the Book of Ruth, which states, “In the days when the judges ruled,” the background of the book was the judges’ era. According to how the last character was presented in the genealogy of the Book of Ruth in 4:22, “Jesse fathered David,” we can deduce that this book was not written after David was anointed king. Since Samuel was the one who had anointed David and died before David was king, Samuel could be the author of the book. In addition, from the Hebrew writing style, as well as the practice of certain Jewish customs described in the book rarely seen during the kingship time period — such as the Levirate marriage and taking off one’s sandals to seal a deal — we can infer that the book was most likely written in the early days of the Israeli kingship or before. Since there is no author signature in the book, the author cannot be definitively determined. Perhaps the story of Ruth had been circulating for a long time, and this inspiring story was later written down by a talented person.

### 3. The Time Period of the Story

a. Boaz was the son of Salmon, and Salmon was the son of Nahshon, the tribal chief of Judah. Salmon is probably one of the two spies whom Joshua sent to spy on Jericho. Salmon later married the prostitute Rahab, who helped the spies in Jericho and gave birth to Boaz (Mat 1:5). If we use the date of Salmon to determine the time period of the story, the events of this book should have taken place in the early judges' period, around 1350 B.C.

b. If we look at David as the great-grandson of Boaz, then the approximate time of the story of Ruth might have happened in the late period of the judges, that is around 1100 B.C.

#### Great Events and People in the Bible

Events / People	Years (Kings)
Abraham	c. 2000 B.C.
Moses	c. 1500 B.C.
Ruth	c. 1100 B.C.
One united kingdom (Saul, David, Solomon)	c. 1000 B.C.
The Northern Kingdom (Israel) destroyed	722 B.C. (King Sargon of Assyria)

<b>Events / People</b>	<b>Years (Kings)</b>
Assyrian conquest	612 B.C.
The Southern Kingdom (Judah) destroyed	586 B.C. (King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon)
Babylonian destruction (prophet Daniel era)	539 B.C. (King Cyrus of Persia)
The First Return of the exiles (Sheshbazzar/Zerubabel etc.)	538 B.C. (King Cyrus of Persia)
Rebuilding of the temple	537 B.C. (King Cambyses of Persia)
Rebuilding of the temple resumed (prophets Haggai and Zechariah)	520 B.C. (King Darius of Persia)
Esther made queen	479 B.C. (King Ahasuerus of Persia)
The Second Return of the exiles-Ezra	458 B.C. (King Artaxerxes of Persia)
The Third Return of of the exiles-Nehemiah (prophet Malachi)	445 B.C. (King Artaxerxes of Persia)

The period of the judges in Israel started with the death of Joshua and ended when Saul became the first king of Israel (1385-1050 B.C.). The Israelites, living in the land of Canaan, were in a loose tribal union, with dif-

ferent judges leading them as military and civil leaders at various stages. This historical period lasted about 300-400 years, and there was no specific description or mention of an exact time when the story of Ruth took place during the period of the judges.

#### **4. The Book's Status in the Bible**

The Jews recited different books of Scripture during the different religious festivals. For example, they read the Song of Solomon during Passover; Lamentations on the ninth day of Ebos (July and August); Ecclesiastes during the Feast of Tabernacles; Esther during the Purim Festival; and Ruth on Pentecost, celebrating the grain harvest. These five books are called “Megilloth” (the “Book”) in the Hebrew Bible.

In the Hebrew Scriptures, the Book of Ruth is placed after *Torah* and *Prophets*, standing with the Psalms, Proverbs, Job, and Song of Solomon as part of the *Writing* of the Old Testament. But in the Greek Septuagint, the Latin Vulgate, and the English Bible, Ruth is placed after the Book of Judges as part of the Old Testament History Book. The Book of Ruth has been recognized as part of the Old Testament canon around 200 B.C.

#### **5. Historical Background**

a. The beginning of the Book of Ruth indicates the time



frame of the story, which was “when the judges ruled.” After the Israelites crossed the Jordan River into Canaan, Israel entered into the three to four hundred years’ era of the judges. During this time, the Israelites slowly lost their faith and experienced religious chaos and moral decline, and all people went their own way.

- b. The ten tribes settled in the North were often subjected to disturbance from foreign countries, where war continued, and they were unable to rest. On the other hand, the tribes of Judah, who dwelt in the South, were less afflicted, but they often experienced natural disasters and famine.
- c. At that time, certain unique customs of the Israelites were practiced by the people, including the following:
  - (1) When reaping their crops, people were asked not to cut the edges of the fields or pick up what had been dropped in the fields, in order to provide for the poor, the widows, and foreigners (Lev 23:22).
  - (2) A widow’s brother-in-law or close male relative had the responsibility to redeem the estate of the deceased. If he declined, he would be ridiculed.
  - (3) If the widow had no son and married the brother or close relative of the deceased husband, then their eldest son would take her deceased husband’s name in order to inherit his estate.
  - (4) A woman could not ask a man to marry her, but she

could warm his feet when he was sleeping to express her desire to marry him.

(5) Grooms in Israel would cover the bride with a scarf, symbolizing their protection of the bride.

## 6. Story Summary

In the chaotic years of the judges, the author of the Book of Ruth recounts a family's life story. There was a famine in the land, so Elimelech, because of his lack of faith, took his whole family to live in the country of Moab. After he died, his two sons married Moabite women; one was named Ruth, the other Orpah. But the sons also passed away, leaving their mother Naomi and her two foreign daughters-in-law as widows.

In Moab, Naomi heard how the LORD had blessed His people by ending the famine, so she decided to go back home. Even though Orpah stayed in Moab, Ruth decided to return to Bethlehem with her mother-in-law. There, Ruth worked hard in the fields, wholeheartedly caring for Naomi. Soon she met a close relative, Boaz, who was willing to take full responsibility for his deceased relatives by marrying Ruth, keeping the name of Elimelech alive and thereby preserving his estate. Ruth married Boaz and gave birth to Obed, the ancestor of David. From the story, we witness the faithfulness of God, and He has mercy toward all, allowing a Gentile Moabite woman, Ruth,

to be able to enter into the family lineage of kings and Jesus Christ.

## 7. Features

- a. Although the author of the Book of Ruth does not explicitly use the word “love” in his writing, this book is full of warmth, self-sacrifice, and dedication. The spirit of “love your neighbor as yourself” is evident throughout this book. Naomi deeply cares for her two daughters-in-law. She asks God to remember their loving kindness toward her family and to provide for them with new homes and new husbands. Naomi’s actions reflect her selfless love and compassion toward her daughters-in-law. Ruth moves far from her native home, yet she is absolutely devoted and shows great love and loyalty to Naomi, who has suffered the loss of her husband and two sons.

The sympathy and generosity of Boaz toward Naomi and Ruth, which go way beyond the law’s requirement, also display his respectful fear of God and his redeeming love toward his family members. Besides love, compassion, and loyalty, Boaz also demonstrates another admirable attribute – self-control. When he encounters Ruth in the field in the middle of the night, he is not only able to overcome physical temptation, but is also truthful to bring up the fact that there is

another closer relative who has a higher priority of obligation in redeeming Naomi's estate. Boaz properly deals with the closer relative in front of the town elders to open the way for his relationship with Ruth. Besides redeeming just the land, Boaz goes beyond, redeeming both Naomi and Ruth as well. In doing this, he receives the elders' approval and their unanimous blessing. All of these actions demonstrate loyalty and self-control, which are qualities worth learning for all of us. The characters in the Book of Ruth serve as great role models for the society of that time. They truly attest to the fact that if people follow God's law and live out His mercy, God will surely reward them abundantly.

- b. The writing style of this book is refined, elegant, and lively, with one climax after another. The plot is fascinating, the characters are vivid, and emotions are depicted with delicate descriptions. Some have called this book "a pearl in the Hebrew Literature."
- c. Though the writer does not explicitly tell readers that God guided the story directly, the name of the LORD appears 18 times in the four chapters of the book. Readers can definitely sense that God is concerned about the lives of His people. Whether it is the encounter of Boaz and Ruth, the plan of Naomi, or the relinquishment of the rights of a close relative, God's hand is leading the story as it moves from one scene to the next. Although

God allows droughts and sorrows to happen, He gives children to the infertile and hope to the desperate, and He rewards those who trust in Him. He is the source of blessing and happiness.

God stays behind the scenes in guiding the development of the story in the Book of Ruth, but we can vividly see God's sovereignty in every detail, from the dialogue of the characters to the characters' relationship with God. Jehovah God listens to all the prayers of the characters in the book, and He gives them more than what is desired. This is seen in Naomi's prayer for Ruth and a new family for her (1:9) and when Boaz asked the LORD to bless Ruth to repay her devotion to Naomi (2:12; 3:10), which is fulfilled when Boaz then marries Ruth and fathers a son (4:13). We also see this when Naomi's blessing for Boaz (2:19) is fulfilled in David's genealogy. When the elders pray for Boaz to have children with Ruth (4:12), their prayer is favorably answered in the next verse. In addition, as the women pray for Obed's name to be famous in Israel (4:14), God makes Obed the grandfather to King David (4:22).

There are only two direct references to the works of God in this book. The first is in 1:6, "that the LORD had considered his people and given them food." This signals the turning point for the suffering family, since

Naomi and Ruth now would have food to survive. The second reference is in 4:13, “the LORD made her conceive, and she bore a son.” This enables Naomi to have a grandson and for Elimelech to have descendants to inherit his name and property. The tragedy and crisis of the family is completely resolved! These two key points lead to a joyful, grateful, and happy ending to the story, where God’s love is manifested directly upon each person who trusts and loves Him.

There are also two important moments in the Book of Ruth in which the author uses the phrase “happened to” to express God’s guidance behind the scenes. In chapter 2, verse 3, Ruth “happened to” go into the field of Boaz, which lead them to meet each other and eventually get married. The second one is in 4:1, when the closer relative “happened to” walk by while Boaz is at the gate of the city. This allows Boaz to become the only qualified relative of Naomi’s family to redeem the family of Elimelech, giving Ruth a family and Naomi a grandson. From the story’s beginning, climax, and resolution, God demonstrates that He chooses those who fear Him and those who understand His will to accomplish His plan.

- d. One of the themes of this book is that admission to the kingdom of God is not based on status, fame, or heritage, but on being justified through the salvation of Je-

sus Christ and then being led by the Holy Spirit to obey the will of God and keep the truth. The love of the Father is not affected by color, sex, or race; it will be given to those who seek refuge in Him, regardless of their nationality. God's offer of salvation is universal.

Although Ruth is a Gentile woman, she is rewarded with a double blessing from God because she trusts the God of Israel and wholeheartedly follows the Law. Not only does God meet all her physical needs, she also is well received by the Israelite community and is regarded as highly as Rachel and Leah, who mothered the 12 tribes of Israel. God brings Ruth into David's genealogy and even makes the Messiah come out of this family a thousand years later. This conveys that the God of Israel is the LORD of the whole earth and the God of all nations. His mercy is over all that He has made, and He watches over all those who know and trust Him.

When we see how God blesses Ruth for truly believing in Him, we become more convinced that God will surely reward those who follow His will. The Book of Ruth not only shows that God cared for His people during times of suffering before Christ, but also strengthens the faith of Christians after the coming of Christ as well. The message of this book will comfort each Christian who becomes a child of God through

putting our faith in Christ Jesus. The Father is still working today to lead the people of the world into His family that is full of love, grace, and righteousness!

## 8. Outlines

There are four chapters in Ruth, which can be studied in the following seven lessons:

- (1) Introduction of the Book of Ruth
- (2) Moving Out of Bethlehem (1:1-5)
- (3) Turning Back (1:6-22)
- (4) Marvelous Encounter in the Harvest Field (2:1-23)
- (5) Union Made in Heaven (3:1-4:10)
- (6) The Blessed Family (4:11-22)
- (7) Salvation Plan

## III. Video Viewing

Play DVD session 1: “Introduction”.

## IV. Study Questions

### 1. Fill in the Blanks:

- (1) In those days, there was no \_\_\_\_\_ in Israel; all the people did what \_\_\_\_\_ (Jug 21:25).



- (2) In the days when the \_\_\_\_\_ ruled, there was a \_\_\_\_\_ in the land (1:1).
- (3) Naomi’s daughter-in-law Ruth is a \_\_\_\_\_.
- (4) There are \_\_\_\_\_ chapters in the Book of Ruth.

## 2. Scripture Study:

- (1) Read Judges 17:6, 18:1, 19:1, and 21:25. Why does the Bible say, “In those days Israel had no king”?

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- (2) Read Deuteronomy 8:7-10 and 11:11-12. Describe the goodness of the land of Canaan.

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(3) Read Deuteronomy 11:13-17. Why was there a famine in the land of Canaan during the time of Ruth?

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### 3. Discussion and Sharing:

(1) Have you or people around you ever experienced major life events, such as death of loved ones, sickness, loss of marriage or spouse, etc.?

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(2) No matter where you move, how do you continue to live a devoted life as a Christian?

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(3) Have you heard of any stories similar to Ruth's?

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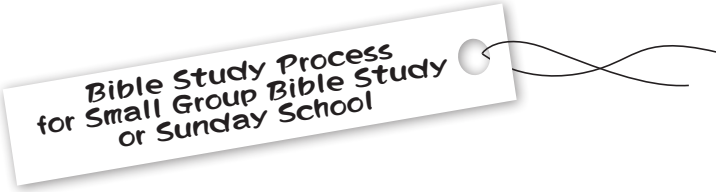
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**Bible Study Process  
for Small Group Bible Study  
or Sunday School**

This part supplies a reference for group leaders and Sunday school teachers. If needed, please refer to Appendix: “Instruction for Bible Study Group Leaders and Instructors.” Please feel free to adjust the process according to time limits.

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**A. Preparation (5-15 minutes)**

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**1. Icebreaker/Introduction:**

- a. Give simple introductions and exchange greetings between Bible study leaders and group members.
- b. Group leader introduces the Book of Ruth. It is one of the Old Testament history books and one of the two books where a woman is the leading character. It talks about a Moabite woman, Ruth, who was married to a son of an Israelite family. She came to know the God of Israel and was blessed by God, becoming the ancestor of King David and the

Savior Jesus Christ. Her story is a great comfort to Christians of every nationality.

## **2. Opening Prayer:**

Dear Heavenly Father, as we get together and study your words, please be with us and bless us. May the Holy Spirit prepare our hearts and help us to understand your words. May you open our ears so that we can know your will, follow your lead, and be blessed by you. Please give us wisdom and strength through your words, so that we can live a life that is pleasing to you. We also want to seek after your heart and be a blessing to the people around us. We pray all these in Jesus' name. Amen.

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## **B. Development (40-90 minutes)**

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### **I. Scripture Reading:**

Deuteronomy 11:11-15; Joshua 21:43-45;  
Judges 2:11-19, 21:25

### **II. Synopsis:**

1. Introduction
2. Author

3. The Time Period of the Story
4. The Book's Status in the Bible
5. Historical Background
6. Story Summary
7. Features
8. Outlines

### **III. Video Viewing:**

Play DVD session 1: "Introduction".

### **IV. Study Questions:**

1. Fill in the Blanks: Questions (1)-(4)
2. Scripture Study: Questions (1)-(3)
3. Discussion and Sharing: Questions (1)-(3)

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## **C. Conclusion (5-15 minutes)**

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### **1. Summary:**

Ruth's story took place in a time when the people were far away from God. Therefore, there was social unrest and constant disaster, which affected each family to a different degree and thus gave a different experience to each family. With difficult surroundings, people may experience a crisis of faith. However, the story of

Naomi and Ruth shows us God's faithfulness and mercy. He will never forsake His children and will help those who are faithful to Him. Until today, the book of Ruth continues to tell us about God's never-changing love and mercy forever.

## 2. Homework Assignment:

- a. Memory verse: "Your people shall be my people, and your God my God" (Rut 1:16b).
- b. Bible Study: Ruth Chapter 1.

### \* Closing Prayer: \*

Dear Heavenly Father, thank you that in time of chaos and famine, you show your love and redemption plan through the story of Ruth. I want to be one who follows you, fears you, and is blessed by you. Please use my life to testify for you. In the name of Jesus Christ I pray. Amen.