

# **The Book of Ruth - an introduction** a study for the College and Career/ Young Families Sunday School class at Gulf Coast Baptist Church by Steve Thomas 6/2/24

## **Introduction**

Set during the time of the Judges, probably either Gideon or Sampson, the book of Ruth is a book with a bit of everything. Starting with a society fallen on hard times, and a tragedy within a family, then moving to redemption, and leading to the fulfilling of a Divine Plan coming to fruition for God's people, this book teaches many lessons that will aid the believer today. It is a book of personalities, Naomi, Ruth, and then Boaz each take a turn center stage. It is a narrative of God's provision set against poor decisions, personal tragedy, and loss. It tells of personal faith, and God using individuals to accomplish His purposes in a tumultuous and unforgiving world.

## **Lovingkindness - a theme**

The Hebrew term for lovingkindness - *hesed* - is put on display several times in this book. Ruth shows it towards Naomi after the loss of their husbands, God showed it to the ladies when they returned to the land of Israel (2:20), and then Boaz showed it to Naomi and Ruth when he redeemed them and their possession.

The lovingkindness of God revealed through the law is evident as well. The book of Leviticus gives instructions to land owners about leaving gleanings for the indigent people of the land. God provides for all His people, regardless of status or wealth.

## **The Backdrop - Self-indulgence and a dearth of faith**

The times of the Judges were a hard time in Israel's history. The hard times existed mainly because of self-inflicted strife. The first 2 chapters of Judges give us the backdrop for the books of Judges and Ruth. The lists of incomplete obedience close the first chapter of Judges. Time after time, and tribe after tribe shows that Israel did not follow God's instructions to purge the land of the inhabitants. Verses 1-26 of the first chapter show the faithfulness of God to Israel, giving them victory wherever they attempted to follow God's leading. However, the people stopped conquering, and failing to drive out the inhabitants of the land. Instead, they made the inhabitants give tribute allowing them to stay in the promised land with the Israelites.

Joshua and Caleb remained faithful throughout their lives and Joshua died when he was 110 years old. But the failure to train the next generation was a problem (Judges 2:10). The gods of the people left in the land became the gods of the next generation of Israelites (2:12). These events show the wisdom in God's law, and the benefits of following it. One of the many benefits of God's laws for His people was the lack of exposure that the Israelites would have had to the temptations of the land by removing them from it. By allowing the peoples to remain, they and succeeding generations were exposed to the false gods, and sensual worship of them. Baal, Ashtaroth, and Baalim were mentioned more than once in these chapters.

The people wandered away from God in their initial prosperity. They dwelt in safety in cities that they did not build. They ate of fruit from vineyards that they did not plant or maintain. They enjoyed the riches that their fathers took from their enemies. They had not

learned how to trust in God while experiencing sacrifice and hardship. Having all of these things handed to them, they had time to pursue their pleasures which became their focus, serving the gods of the Amorites. This led to the verse in 2:10. The parents passed on prosperity to their children but not the stories of God's faithfulness in delivering them from Egypt and the stories of Joshua and the victories. These stories were commanded to be passed on (Deut 6). This was the purpose of Joshua's piling of the stones when the waters of the Jordan were cut off (Josh 4:1-7). These conversations were obviously not happening enough to influence the next generation. These were the Israelites of the times of the book of Ruth.

Judges 21:25 sums up the philosophy of the people of this time. Everyone did what was right in their own eyes. We see something very similar today. Individuality and personal rights are high on the list of priorities today. We hear things like: "If it feels right, do it!" or "Let you be you."

### **Conclusion: A Refreshing Contrast**

Set against this backdrop of failure, tragedy, and selfishness comes the faith and lovingkindness of Ruth and Boaz. God shows His provision of His people in the midst of ugliness and selfishness. He uses these anomalies in the lineage of Christ, alongside Rahab, Bathsheba, and other human frailties, God shows that He can take broken things and make something beautiful. He is familiar with our proclivities to make the wrong choice and can turn it into something that is worthy of praise.

Consider this paragraph from Darby *"Thus, if on one side the Book of Judges shews us the falling away of the people of Israel, and their failure under responsibility, even when God was their helper, on the other side this touching and precious book sets before us, as the dawn of better things, grace acting in the midst of difficulties, securing the fulfilment of promise, and embellishing this scene of misery and sin by lovely and beautiful instances of faith, precious fruits of grace, whether in weakness and devotedness, or in strength and kindness, and always in accordance with the perfect will of God, and assuring by this touching history, as a type, the full restoration of Israel to blessing according to promise. It is a refreshing and lovely picture in the midst of the hard-mindedness and sorrows of Israel."*

e-Sword Gen12:10-20 on the question of leaving the promised land during a time of famine

The rest of the chapter is the history of his personal want of it. Pressed by circumstances, he does not consult God, finds himself in the presence of the world, where he has sought help and refuge, and denies his true relationship with his wife (just as has been done in respect of the church), is cherished by the world, which God at last judges, sending Abram again out from it. During this period, and until he was returned to the place from which he started, he had no altar. When he left Egypt and returned to his strangership in Canaan, he had what he had before. But he must return first to the same place and find his altar again.