

RUTH

THE GOD OF SECOND CHANCES



Ruth 1 – The God of Second Chances: “The Story isn’t Finished Yet!”

Sharon Noble

3/10/23

NOTES for Online

Today we beginning the series in the small book of Ruth.

Some believe that this book was authored by Samuel – the prophet but we don’t know for sure. What we do know is that a woman didn’t write this book because it would be LONGER and have a lot more DETAILS! The book of Ruth is only 4 chapters.

It is a Story of SECOND CHANCES.

PRAY

CONTEXT

God uses Moses to bring the people out of Egypt, they wander through the desert for 40 years and then Moses hands off the leadership reins to Joshua and dies.

Joshua takes the people of Israel into the Promised Land and begins to conquer the people who live there – these people are doing evil in God’s sight. One example, is burying a baby alive as a sacrifice to their gods. Awful, awful stuff!

One of the first cities they conquer is Jericho – remember the song “Joshua fought the battle of Jericho” and the walls came a tumbling down. Some of us sung that as kids?

The people of Israel walk around the city six times lead by the Ark of the Covenant and the priests and then on the seventh day they blow their horns and shout AND the walls came a tumblin’ down!

Before the Israelites walk around the walls, two spies go into Jericho and meet a prostitute named, Rahab, and she helps them. They promise that she and her family will be saved when Jericho is destroyed.

Later Rahab marries a man named, Salmon, like the fish and becomes the Mother of Boaz – who is a main character in the story of Ruth. Spoil Alert – he plays the love interest of Ruth!

Ruth unfolds like a great play or piece of literature – in fact the Israelites would read this story each time they celebrated Pentecost.

Deuteronomy (Moses dies); Joshua (Leads the Israelites into the Promised Land); Judges (The people disobey God and he raises Judges up) and Ruth

The time of the judges is a dark time for the Israelites. They are settled in their tribes but the people continue to rebel against God and He raises up judges to judge their actions. There is a lot of war and bloodshed.

This brings us to the doorstep of Ruth – most likely the land has been ravaged by war and the crops destroyed.

Ruth 1:1-3

1 In the days when the judges ruled in Israel, a severe famine came upon the land. So a man from Bethlehem in Judah left his home and went to live in the country of Moab, taking his wife and two sons with him. 2 The man's name was Elimelech, and his wife was Naomi. Their two sons were Mahlon and Kilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in the land of Judah. And when they reached Moab, they settled there. 3 Then Elimelech died, and Naomi was left with her two sons.

This Story isn't getting off to a good start!

What in the world are they doing in Moab – God has forbidden the Israelites to associate with the Moabites because they participate in things like sexual immorality and child sacrifice. Does not sound like a great place to move your family!

What is Elimelech thinking? Has he forgotten that his first job as a husband and father is to care for his family and their relationship to God? Moving the family out of the security of God's land and His presence is NOT a good choice.

No mention of Elimelech asking God if moving to Moab is a good idea – he just moves them because they are hungry. That may initially sound like a good reason but in the end – we must consult God on all these big decisions – He always knows what is Best for our families.

EXAMPLE: Joshua 9:14 – Examine their provisions but did not consult the Lord. Got into a bad treaty with Hivittes.

Let's back up a bit...

A. Why in the world is Bethlehem in Judah mentioned twice?

1. There are actually two Bethlehems at this time – one in Judah and the other in Zebulun. The twelve tribes have settled in Caanan and the people of this day need to know that the author is referring to the Bethlehem in Judah.
2. The second reason is that Bethlehem plays a really key role for all of us! Who is born in Bethlehem? JESUS! Rahab, the prostitute, and Ruth, the Moabite (enemies of Israel) both become Great, Great Grandmother and Great Grandmother to King David born in Bethlehem and then we know that Jesus comes from the line of David and is born in Bethlehem. The people of this day – did not know about Jesus but they did know about David and that the Messiah would one day come from the line of David. The Author is establishing the line of David and the Messiah here. (Matthew 1:5)

NO ONE is out of God's reach! If God weaves into the line of Jesus, a prostitute and a Moabite then He is putting a giant exclamation point on that point! YOU are not out of God's reach.

He is the God of SECOND CHANCES!

Life is Harsh and Messy but that doesn't discredit God's sovereignty, mercy and love. He knows how our story ends!

Ruth 1:4-5

4 The two sons married Moabite women. One married a woman named Orpah and the other a woman named Ruth. 5 But about ten years later, both Mahlon and Kilion died. This left Naomi alone, without her two sons or her husband.

The moment they took Moabite women as wives they broke the Mosaic Law.

When we start straying from what God has laid out for us in his Word, we continue to make choices that fall outside God's perfect plan for us. One bad choice leads to another bad choice and soon we have MESSED up our lives!

We also see that sometimes tragedy hits and it may not be our fault but this family is no longer in the midst of a loving community that can carry them through this. They have left the blessings of God by taking things into their own hands.

Naomi's life is a mess. What is she going to do now? Her husband and sons are dead. Her grief is beyond measure.

STORY – Debbie’s story of losing her son and husband in a car accident. People of God surrounded her and carried her through. Today she is happily remarried.

Tim Keller writes...

“It is difficult for us today to appreciate the significance of child-bearing in ancient times. We live in an individualistic age in which we tend to dream of individual success, achievement, and prominence. That was not true in ancient times. All aspirations and dreams were for your family’s success and prominence. The family was your primary identity, not your vocation, friendships and so on. It was the bearer of all hopes and dreams. Therefore, there was nothing more important than to have and raise children who loved and honored you and who walked in your ways. In light of this, female ‘barrenness’ was considered the worse possible curse. A woman in this situation could not avoid feeling like a terrible failure.”

Ruth 1:6-10

6 Then Naomi heard in Moab that the Lord had blessed his people in Judah by giving them good crops again. So Naomi and her daughters-in-law got ready to leave Moab to return to her homeland. 7 With her two daughters-in-law she set out from the place where she had been living, and they took the road that would lead them back to Judah. 8 But on the way, Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, “Go back to your mothers’ homes. And may the Lord reward you for your kindness to your husbands and to me. 9 May the Lord bless you with the security of another marriage.” Then she kissed them good-bye, and they all broke down and wept. 10 “No,” they said. “We want to go with you to your people.”

Naomi must have created an environment in her home that created a deep relationship between she and her daughter-in-laws. They are going to return with her to Judah. This might be indicative of the woman that she was and even reflect her name – sweetness. There seems to be a bond between these women that may have been forged through tragedy but most likely was built over the last 10 years of living together. They are deeply committed to Naomi.

Perhaps also Naomi is thinking of her great love for the women and not wanting them to feel obliged to go to Judah with her. She can not guarantee another marriage. She does bless them as she sends them away. They broke down and wept – their relationship is deep and strong. These young women have stayed with Naomi showing strength of character and loyalty to Naomi.

HESED - Kindness is a translation of the Hebrew “Hesed”. This is a major theme throughout this book. All the positive characteristics that flow out of a covenant relationship – love, grace, mercy, kindness, loyalty, faithfulness, goodness and benevolence.

This is the word that Naomi uses to describe the type of kindness that her daughters-in-laws had shown her. These women have a deep bond.

What I can't get away from is that, it appears, like neither of these woman have faith in the one true God of Israel – why is Naomi pushing them away?

Doesn't seem like a great evangelistic tactic!

Perhaps she is grieving so badly that she can not see a future for these two women in a relationship with God? Sometimes our grief can cloud our judgment and we miss what is most important for someone else. Our focus is only on ourselves.

We need to be patient with people when they are in the pit of life – their focus may be singular for a time. It can't stay there but this is understandable.

STORY: My brother was in a diving accident when he was 18 – broke his neck. Life can be hard. I remember that there was another person in ICU with him whose daughter had just had an accident and my Dad said – I am struggling to go and pray – I lack the strength. He did go and pray with them. God gave Dad the strength!

That is what Naomi and these women still lack is the security that relationship with God can provide and the strength that the community of God provides.

The road back to Judah and into a relationship with God is a hard one and they must choose which road they will take – the one back to Moab or the one to Judah.

Ruth 1:11-13

11 But Naomi replied, "Why should you go on with me? Can I still give birth to more sons who could grow up to be your husbands? 12 No, my daughters, return to your parents' homes, for I am too old to marry again. And even if it were possible, and I were to get married tonight and bear sons, then what? 13 Would you wait for them to grow up and refuse to marry anyone else? No of course not, my daughters! Things are far more bitter for me than for you, because the Lord himself has raised his fist against me."

Naomi appears to going off the deep end here – she is in a hopeless state. Her depression has overwhelmed her, her grief has blinded her and the idea of caring for the two daughter-in-laws is probably overwhelming her.

Notice too that she blames God – He has raised his fist against me. Elimelech made the choice to move to Moab and she is living with that reality but her husband and sons dying may just be one of those tragedies in life. Yet she blames God for both.

Why do we automatically go to blaming God when our poor choices render bad results or tragedy strikes? It seems to be our natural bent! But this story is about God's *Hesed* – the story isn't over and God is going to show up and blow Naomi's mind!

Anyone here gone off the deep end of grief, depression, deep sadness, blame because of a situation in your life that is out of your control? I encourage you to continue to watch the person of Naomi – let her be one of your spiritual mentors.

Her story seems hopeless at this point but God's story is being told through Naomi and it isn't finished yet! YOUR Story isn't finished yet!

STORY: Tony Campolo – “It's Friday's but Sunday's a comin'” . Things must have seemed hopeless on Friday to the disciples, to Mary, to the Soldiers, to the Crowd... but Sunday's a comin'!

God is building a story of *HESED* in Naomi's life and her Sunday's a comin' – she just can't see it yet.

Ruth 1:14-15

14 And again they wept together, and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law good-bye But Ruth clung tightly to Naomi. 15 “Look,” Naomi said to her, “your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods. You should do the same.”

Orpah makes her choice – she goes back to Moab and her gods. She is not ready to face the long journey to Judah, serve the God of Israel and perhaps never marry. It isn't an easy choice and Orpah makes the choice she knows.

There comes a point where we all must choose who we are going to *SERVE*. Do we stand with God and move forward into a new promise or do we want to go back to our “Moab” and dwell in the land we know?

“Departed from her with a kiss. Bade her farewell for ever. She loved Naomi; but she did not love her so well as to quit her country for her sake. Thus many have a value for Christ, and yet come short of salvation by him, because they cannot find in their hearts to forsake other things for him. They love him, and yet leave him, because they do not love him enough, but love other things better.” Benson Commentary

...BUT RUTH CLUNG tightly to Naomi.

Naomi is engaged in a “Turn back campaign” – surprising that Ruth doesn't start to feel unwanted by Naomi!

Naomi is leaving Moab and the gods of Moab – she is clear about returning to Judah and to the God of Israel. If Ruth chooses to go with her, she is ALSO leaving the gods of Moab and declaring Yahweh or the God of Israel as her God and the Jewish people – her people. She is leaving her homeland, family and gods behind – entering a new life.

We are beginning to see the Naomi of 10 years ago!

Naomi is not mincing words here – she knows that following God is not always easy and her bitter life is proof but she wants to make sure that her daughter-in-law makes a decision that is not flippant or rash.

Ruth 1:16-17

16 But Ruth replied, “Don’t ask me to leave you and turn back. Wherever you go, I will go; wherever you live, I will live. Your people will be my people, and your God will be my God. 17 Wherever you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord punish me severely if I allow anything but death to separate us!”

You can almost hear the exasperation in Ruth’s voice – Don’t ask me to leave you! Perhaps Ruth remembered the Naomi who was pleasant and sweet and hung onto that through this new bitter Naomi. She had the insight to see through it – for she had decided to believe in Naomi and her God.

Unlike Orpah...Ruth is choosing Jehovah to be her God!

She is turning her back on Moab and the gods of Moab and moving forward to join the Israelites and serve their God.

Ruth has chosen Jehovah – she uses his name here in a declaration rather than the general name for a god. She is choosing to follow the God of Israel – Jehovah. She is probably assuming that she will never marry again – she is dedicating her life to God and Naomi.

Do you need to walk away from something today? Have you been living in Moab and you need to return to the land of Judah? Is God calling you to make a CHOICE today to return?

Ruth 1:18-19

18 When Naomi saw that Ruth was determined to go with her, she said nothing more. 19 So the two of them continued on their journey. When they came to Bethlehem, the entire town was excited by their arrival. “Is it really Naomi?” the women asked.

Ruth is declaring an oath – an unbreakable promise to Naomi. Once Naomi recognizes that she is making an oath that can only be broken by death – she ceases to plead.

The 7-10 day journey was about 60-75 miles on foot – two rivers to cross – threats and dangers along the way. Not ideal for two women traveling alone.

As they Naomi and Ruth arrive the women notice them and welcome them home! Naomi and Elimelech were persons of rank and when they left – they left as beautiful, well-respected people and wealthy. But as they return, Naomi is aged, sorrowful, alone, no wealth, accompanied by a foreigner – it is obvious that life has beat her up a bit.

I love the fact the women receive her generously and we don't see judgement towards her. Wish I could say this was always true of me.

STORY – Recovery Home on our street. One day we see a woman who looks like she might be strung out on drugs. My response vs Matt's response - someone who has been beat up by life. Matt's response was more godly – reflected the Hessed of God's character.

The women come out to greet her and she says...

Ruth 1:20-21

20 Don't call me Naomi," she responded. "Instead, call me Mara for the Almighty has made life very bitter for me. 21 I went away full but the Lord has brought me home empty. Why call me Naomi when the Lord has caused me to suffer and the Almighty has sent such tragedy upon me?"

Naomi left "sweet and pleasant" and returns "bitter" and full of sorrow. Today we would say that she is depressed and broken. Life has mistreated her and she wears it on her face and in her presence.

God knows the plans he has for us but sometimes it includes suffering and pain – especially, when we are culpable. Most likely Naomi is feeling a great sense of guilt here for leaving the Promised Land and going to live in a foreign land that God had forbid. That is tough when we are to blame.

BUT WE SERVE THE GOD OF SECOND CHANCES!

The first step is to CHOOSE GOD - we must make a choice like Orpah and Ruth made – do we go back to where we came or do we move forward and dwell in the land that God has provided for us?

Naomi has also made the choice to return to the God of Israel and her home. Her story is taking a new turn where we have a glimpse of Hope!

Ruth 1:22

22 So Naomi returned from Moab, accompanied by her daughter-in-law Ruth, the young Moabite woman. They arrived in Bethlehem in late spring, at the beginning of the barley harvest.

Love this last verse because it indicates the next scene – this story isn't finished. God is still writing it!

The reality is that Naomi has so much to look forward to – full harvest, Ruth, Boaz and a baby – her family becoming a part of the line of the Christ but she is too early on in the story to see all that.

Naomi thinks that God has destroyed her life but as the story unfolds – we will see that God is giving her a SECOND CHANCE to live out a life that she could only have imagined!

I want to close with a story of Hope and Second Chances.

STORY: David and Svea Flood

PRAYER

5 Questions to Discuss with your Family or Friends:

1. Does the life of Elimelech and Naomi remind you of anyone? How did that story turn out?
2. Which character do you relate to most? Elimelech, Naomi, Orpah or Ruth. Why?
3. Have you faced a decision where you needed to ask God for counsel? What did you do?
4. Is there something in your life that you need to choose to walk away from AND choose to walk towards a life of wholeness and blessing?
5. God writes His story of Heseid and Second Chances through our lives. Where is He at in writing the story of your life?

Bibliography & Resources:

Bible Hub <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/ruth/1-1.htm> (various commentaries)

Bible Project video: Ruth <https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/ruth/>

Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties by Gleason L. Archer

Ruth by J. Vernon McGee

Ruth #1 – “Necessary Endings and New Beginnings” by Mark Driscoll <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HaDzt-XTu1A>

The Living Room Series, Ruth: Loss, Love, & Legacy by Kelly Minter

The MacArthur Bible Commentary by John MacArthur

What the Bible is All About by Henrietta C. Mears

Aggie Hurst's story <https://deeprootsathome.com/aggie-hurst-the-astounding-story-of-a-girl-without-a-country/>