**Redemption**

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**Four Studies in Ruth**

# Introduction

The book of Ruth is a triangular story: three lives connect. The Israelite woman Naomi, her Moabite daughter-in-law Ruth, and the Israelite man Boaz. In some ways it is a man-meets-woman story. It certainly has romantic elements: it begins with tragedy, moves towards a marriage, and ends with the birth of a much-desired child.

The beauty of Ruth is that it is ‘about’ many things. Because of its setting among God’s people in the town of Bethlehem, this practical romance story is charged with the mystery of how God loves his people and cares for them. Ruth is about struggling to trust God through grief; about the nature of faithful love; about how we should interpret God’s law and about how God meets His promises of redemption for his people.

Ruth shows us how God accepts everyone who comes to him in faith, how he loves and provides for his people in terrible times, and how his plan to save his people unfolds in the lives of normal people.

Ruth is set in the time of the judges. That is after Joshua had led Israel out of the desert and into the promised land but before the time of the kings of Israel. Therefore at this time Israel is a nation that is bonded together by their belief in the one God who rescued them from Egypt – the God who they should treat as their king. Ruth seems to be written at a later time looking back at the events to show how in difficult times faithfulness in God and his promises leads to redemption. It also looks forward to Jesus coming as the child Ruth bore to Boaz and presented to Naomi is an ancestor of Jesus.

# Study One – Ruth 1

*Read Judges 21:25.*

What was Israel like during the time of the Judges? How did people behave?

The phrase “Israel had no king” both meant that Israel had no human king, but also that many did not submit to God as their king. Therefore rather than people seeking to obey God’s law, they did what they wanted. This was not what God wanted for Israel.

*Read Ruth 1:1-18.*

What stands out from the story?

How do Naomi’s family respond to the famine?

Should Naomi’s family leave Israel and settle among the enemies of God’s people? Should they take wives from among these enemies?

Famine is hard. Surviving famine while working on the land is not easy. So we should not be too quick to judge people trying to escape it and survive and as we will find out, one of the wives found faith in the one God. However, at the same time, while we can excuse their actions that does not make the actions right. It is hard to see any trust in God in the family’s flight to Moab. In addition it was Moabite woman that seduced Israel away from God, just before they entered the promised land. (Num. 25:1-3)

Do we put our own survival ahead of trusting God? Are their other things we prioritise before God?

In the first few verses of Ruth, everything is backwards. Famine causes a family to leave Israel and live in Moab. God’s promises of food in the land seem to have failed. Bethlehem which means the ‘house of bread’ has no food. So the family leave the promised land to live with Israel’s hated idol-worshipping enemies, the Moabites. While we should be careful about condemning people running away from potential disaster this is supposed to make us feel uncomfortable. The Israelites were supposed to seek God’s promises in the promised land not outside it.

Then all the male members of the family die so no heirs remain. This was seen at the time as a sign of God withholding his blessing on the family, as having heirs maintained the family line in Israel. The focus moves to Naomi and her daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth. Their story unfolds in the shadow of grief.

What does Naomi hear? How does she respond?

Is God coming to rescue his people something we should expect to see? Why?

How should Jesus coming, suffering and dying for us help us cope with suffering?

How does Naomi bless Orpah and Ruth? How does this reflect her faith?

Naomi tries to persuade her daughters-in-law to go back to their families and remarry. What are the reasons she gives? How does Naomi describe her situation? (v13)

How do Orpah and Ruth respond? (v14)

What promises does Ruth make to Naomi? Who does she rely on to keep her to her promises? (V16-17)

Worship of the Moabite god named Chemosh, involved human sacrifice (2 Kings 3:17). The Moabite gods were very human in nature and fickle. It is clear from Naomi saying that Orpah had returned to her gods that while Mahlon and Kilion had married Moabites, they had expected their wives to join with them in worshipping their God. The contrast with the gods of their people would have been obvious.

Ruth uses the name of the Israelite God in v17, rather than a general name for God as she commits to going with Naomi. How does this promise reflect Ruth’s beliefs? What does this show us about Ruth?

What impact have Naomi and her family had on Ruth? What difference has being a part of their family made?

Who or what has aided us in finding God? How can we encourage others to put their faith in Jesus?

*Read Ruth 1:19-22.*

How does Bethlehem react to Naomi’s return? (v19)

Names for the Israelites tended to reflect who the person was or some characteristic of them. Naomi means pleasant, while Mara means bitter.

How does Naomi use a change of name to show how she feels about what has happened? (v20-21)

Is Naomi right to say that God was responsible for the afflictions she suffered?

Scripture describes a sovereign God that is in control our lives and all that happens to us. While He is not the author of sin, he does allow bad things to happen to us to reveal our hearts and bring us ultimately into a deeper relationship with him. However, suffering and death are not God’s ultimate desire for human beings. In fact Jesus returns to take away suffering and death away.

How have you responded to going through difficulty? Are you bitter about anything that has happened to you?

What are good ways to express anger and grief to God?[[1]](#footnote-1)

The author of Ruth continues to use Naomi and not Mara expressing hope. What other elements of hope are there at the end of the passage for Naomi? For the Israelites?

Naomi has come back without her husband and sons and therefore describes herself as empty. However, she still has a daughter-in-law that is praised throughout the book for being a real blessing to her even being described as “better to you than seven sons”. (Ruth 4:15) Naomi therefore misses the elements of hope in her situation.

Do we sometimes miss elements of hope in difficult times? How can we hold true in such times to the ultimate and certain hope God provides through Christ?

**Suggested prayer points**

* Give thanks for Jesus coming to suffer and die in our place
* Ask that God would seal the truth of the eternal hope Jesus gives us on our hearts so we would persevere through the tough times.
* Pray for those in the group going through tough times

# Study Two – Ruth 2

The Israelites depended on the laws God gave Israel before they entered their land to let them know how they should live. Obedience to the law is how Israelites show their trust in God. But Ruth shows us that obeying the law involves more than doing precisely what it says. The law is meant to provide principles for how we should relate to God and to each other, so that we can know how to love God and our neighbour.

*Read Leviticus 19:1-10.*

What are Israel told to be? Why?

The commands here are primarily about relationships. What relationships are talked about here? How do the commands affect the relationships?

How are the Israelites to provide for the poor and the foreigner? (v9-10)

Do such laws have any bearing on how we might treat the poor and the foreigner today? If so, in what way?

*Read Ruth 2:1-16.*

What does Ruth suggest she does to Naomi? (v2) What does this show about Ruth’s knowledge of God’s law?

What does the passage tell us about Boaz? What does it emphasise?

Ruth is a woman without family ties or social connections. She is also from Moab, an ancient enemy of Israel. Later comments imply that she could encounter real danger while harvesting.

Why does Boaz enquire about Ruth? (v6-7) What does this tell us about Boaz?

What does Boaz suggest to Ruth that she do? (v8-9) Why?

Does Boaz just follow the letter of the law in what he does for Ruth? (v8-9, v14-16) How does Boaz better interpret the Law?

How do Boaz’s actions reflect God’s generosity and mercy that He displays in how he deals with us?

Here Boaz displays character that copies God’s. This could be described as Boaz being holy because God is holy as the passage in Leviticus commands us to be. This passage is repeated by Peter where he says, “Be holy, because I am holy”. (1 Peter 1:16) While holiness is not a term that we tend to use today for everyday Christian living, clearly Peter thinks all Christians should be holy.

How do Boaz’s actions help us understand holiness? How can we seek to be holy?

Why has Ruth found favour with Boaz? (v10-12)

How does Boaz bless Ruth in verse 12?

How is the Lord already working to reward Ruth?

How does Ruth see herself? How does Boaz treat her? (v13,14)

In what ways should we seek to copy Boaz? Are any of these ways a challenge for us?

*Read Ruth 2:17-23.*

How does Naomi react to Ruth’s return? (v20) Why?

What does Naomi asking the Lord to bless Boaz say about her own relationship with God? Is she still just feeling sorry for herself?

Naomi describes Boaz as showing kindness to the living and the dead. Boaz is showing kindness to his dead relatives by remembering their wives. More importantly the word for kindness is often translated as faithful love or mercy and is used for the way God relates to us. It therefore shows Boaz’ generosity to Ruth was not the only way he sought to imitate God and be holy, but that he constantly sought to bring God’s love to others.

How does Boaz challenge us in our relationship with God?

How does the hope Jesus brings transform your life and relationships?

**Suggested prayer points**

* Thank God for sending Jesus as our redeemer to bring us mercy and hope.
* Ask God to write his law in our hearts by the Spirit
* Ask God’s help to transform us to represent him better

# Study Three – Ruth 3:1 to 4:10

*Read Ruth 3:1-6.*

What does Naomi look to find for Ruth? How has Naomi changed? (compare Ruth 1:9, 1:20-21)

What do you like about Naomi’s plan? What do you dislike?

Naomi describes Boaz as a kinsman or guardian redeemer. A kinsman redeemer was supposed to buy family members back from slavery and buy back hereditary property that had passed out of the hands of the clan. He was also supposed to protect and take restitution for relatives that had died. (See Lev. 25:25-30, 47-55 and Num.35:12,19-27)

There are also instructions of how there is an obligation on brothers who live in the same house are to continue the family line if one dies without an heir.

*Read Deuteronomy 25:5-10*

What are the brothers supposed to do for each other? Why?

What happens if the brother refuses to do this? How would this affect the brother’s name?

Being childless and without heirs was considered a disgrace in Israel. It seems appropriate that the brother’s family should be called a name reflecting that to most likely protect his inheritance he had not fulfilled his duties to his brother.

Does this law apply to Naomi (and Ruth)?

Naomi is hoping that Boaz will be a good husband for Ruth. However, neither Boaz nor the closer kinsman redeemer are obligated under the law to take Ruth as a wife as they are not brothers living under the same Ruth. Yet Boaz and therefore Elimelek and his family are descended from Peres. (See Ruth 4:12,18) They would not exist if Tamar had not been so committed to continuing her husband Er’s line that when she was not allowed to sleep with the third brother to do this, she deceived and slept with Er’s father Judah and produced twins. Judah conceded that, “She is more righteous than I.” (Gen. 38:26, Gen. 38 contains the whole story.) Therefore redeeming the family line is a part of the clan’s history as they would not exist without it and everyone would know this. This may be why the closer kinsman redeemer has not acted on his responsibilities.

*Read Ruth 3:7-18.*

What does Ruth do? What does she ask Boaz to do?

How does Boaz respond to Ruth’s request? Why does he praise her?

From what does Boaz protect Ruth?

What issue does Boaz raise? What does Boaz promise?

Does Boaz follow the law? What is the potential cost?

Has obeying God ever cost you or been inconvenient?

*Read Ruth 4:1-10.*

Who does Boaz involve in settling the redemption of the property and line of Elimelek?

How does Boaz follow the law? (v3-4) What condition does Boaz add to this? (v5)

How is Boaz going beyond the letter of the law? How does this better interpret the law?

Why does the other redeemer change his mind? (v6)

A more literal translation of how the narrator says Boaz addresses the kinsman redeemer is a certain someone or John Doe. His name has been lost, which is equivalent to his line being discontinued. Meanwhile Boaz is still spoken about today.

How does the kinsman seeking to maintain his own family line rather than the good of his own line go? How does this compare with Boaz?

How do Naomi and Elimelek benefit from what Boaz proposes? Is there a cost?

How does Jesus fulfil the role of redeemer for us?

Jesus is our representative before God. He offers himself as the living sacrifice that takes away our sin. We cannot offer this sacrifice because we are spiritually dead. He is willing and able to redeem us. However, he also calls us at times to also pay a cost in following him.

Has following Jesus ever been costly for us? How do we feel about suffering for our faith?

**Suggested prayer points**

* Thank God for all that he provides for us including a hope and a future as his children.
* Ask God to enable us to trust Him and live for Him when representing Him is costly
* Pray for anyone in the group that is facing a situation where it is costly representing God

# Study Four – Ruth 4:11-22

Scripture is made up of many kinds of book. Ruth is not the same as Ecclesiastes; both are different to Jeremiah. These different books work together and tell one big story - the story of God rescuing his universe through Jesus. The end of Ruth makes clear that Ruth is not just about redemption for Naomi but that it is a part of the greater story of redemption for mankind that would come from the offspring of the baby given to Naomi to redeem her family line.

*Read Ruth 4:9-12.*

How does Boaz describe what just happened? (v9-10) What are the different aspects of the redemption?

How do the elders and the people respond? (v11-12) What does their blessing on Boaz and Ruth want for them and their household?

What parts of scripture are they remembering?

Rachel and Leah were sisters who both became wives of Jacob, who was later renamed Israel. They competed to provide heirs to Jacob. Leah had six sons including Judah, Rachel had two and their hand maidens also had two sons each as because of Rachel’s initial barrenness the hand maidens were given to Jacob to avoid disgrace. The twelve sons each had their descendants make up one of the twelve tribes of Israel, with each tribe named after the son from whom its descendants came. (Genesis 29:15 – 30:21) Therefore Jacob (Israel) had such standing that he was remembered at that time and is today.

How is this relevant? How does the blessings on Ruth and Boaz reflect this?

How does Rachel’s initial barrenness make her example particularly relevant to Ruth?

*Read Genesis 38:6-26*How did Tamar conceive Perez and Zerah?

What do you think of Tamar’s actions? How about Judah’s?

What are the similarities with Ruth’s story? The differences?

What do the elders mean by their blessing on Boaz and Ruth’s household?

*Read Ruth 4:13-17.*

How quickly does Ruth conceive? How does this show God’s blessing? (compare 4:13 with 1:4,5)

Why is the son so important to Naomi? (v14-15) How does Naomi’s situation now contrast with her situation when she returned?

Have we seen God work in seemingly impossible situations in our lives? How?

How do the women respond to the birth of the child?

 Where else have we seen people bless others in Ruth?

Do ask God to bless others? Should we do so more?

*Read Ruth 4:17-22.*

Where does Boaz’s family line recorded as starting? Why does this make redeeming the family line so important to the clan?

Who is descended from Boaz and Ruth? Why is David important to Israel?

Why is it surprising for Ruth to be involved in David’s family tree? (see 4v10. You can also look at the first study)

What does the king that God chose who is described as being after His heart having people not born as Israelites in his ancestors show us?

Genealogies are not a common type of document in Australia these days. But they are one of the clearest links between the Old and New Testaments. We just follow them to the end.

*Read Matthew 1:1-17.*

Where does Obed’s family line end up?

Jesus is the descendant of Adam who saves humanity. He is the goal of all the genealogies in scripture. The list of names shows that God was working out his plan through Israel’s complicated history.

How is Naomi’s redemption part of God’s plan to save humanity? Did she see God’s plan when she was struggling with grief?

Are there times when we struggle to see what God is doing? How does the book of Ruth help us see that God is sovereign and faithful in his love for us?

**Suggested prayer points**

* Thank God that you are included in his family through Jesus
* Praise God that he works out his plan through his people
* Bless each other to be men and women who represent God and His redemption to each other and the world

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1. The psalms of lament (such as Psalm 22 and 88) give us honest words to express our feelings to God. The books of Lamentations and Job show us that there is a way to grieve and feel pain without abandoning our trust in God. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)