



Ruth: Hope in the Dark

Ruth 1-4

RECAP

The story of Israel's judges closes with a line that could just as well be the opening for the story of Ruth: "In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as they saw fit." (Judges 21:25) God's chosen ones looked more like a reality show gone wrong than a holy beacon of hope. These were dark days. Then a foreigner stepped onto the stage and a candle of hope flickered once again.

This week's focus: God's gracious redemption extends to all.

The story of Ruth is a literary and redemptive gem that glimmers against a dark backdrop. Its opening scene shows Naomi's family as they caravanned away from the Promised Land where famine had left them hungry for food and for hope. They settled in Moab where idol worship was the prevailing ritual and God seemed far away. Naomi's two sons married Moabite women, Orpah and Ruth. The wedding celebrations were too quickly followed by funerals—three of them. Naomi's husband died first. Soon after both of her sons died, too. And all that was left was three widows, no children, and no prospects. Hope was in short supply.

Naomi later heard that the famine had lifted and decided to return to Bethlehem. She sent her daughters-in-law back to their homes where they might find new husbands. Ruth expressed her strong will and even stronger faith by refusing to leave. Her poetic declaration of loyalty and commitment offers the first sign of hope: "*Where you go, I will go; your people will be my people and your God my God.*" Naomi couldn't convince her otherwise, so the duo of widows made the journey back to the Land of Promise where the only hope was mere survival.

Once there, Ruth exercised a widow's right to gather the extra grain from the fields. Her field of choice "just happened" to be owned by a godly man named Boaz. He also "happened" to be a family guardian who could carry on the heritage of Naomi's deceased husband and sons. He noticed Ruth from the start and admired the way she worked to provide for her aging mother-in-law. Boaz offered both his help and protection; Ruth noticed him, too.

Jewish law required a family guardian to redeem both a widow and her land to preserve the family line. Naomi told Ruth to offer herself in marriage to Boaz. He was delighted but also knew of a closer relative who had the right of first refusal. That man chose to forfeit Naomi's land since it also meant he would have to marry Ruth, which would threaten the inheritance he would pass along to his own children. Neither Boaz nor Ruth were disappointed by his choice since his refusal paved the way for Boaz to fulfill his role as a family guardian or "kinsman redeemer".

Boaz gladly married Ruth and redeemed the family's land. God cheerfully restored Naomi and planted a family tree: Ruth and Boaz—Obed—Jesse—King David—Messiah Jesus.



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There's no denying this story is a great romance. But even more, it brings us to a defining episode in the greatest love story ever told. Boaz's love for Ruth is a mirror image of the heart of God. Boaz steps in as a willing kinsmen redeemer and foreshadows the ONE who would step in as the Redeemer for all people. So, it turns out that even the "not so chosen" are chosen after all. Proof that even in the darkest of times, God's plan will overwhelm every obstacle, overturn every injustice, and overcome completely in the end.

SHARE (5-10 min)

Icebreaker Question: What is the meaning or story behind your name? What does your name say about you?

STUDY (about 30 min) Read Ruth 1-4

1. Meanings of biblical names are always significant. Elimelek's name meant "my God is King". Naomi's name meant "my pleasantness", but she later asked to be called Mara, meaning "bitterness." Ruth's name meant "friendship". Boaz's name meant "swift strength". Who best lived up to their names and who did not?
2. Compare Naomi's attitude at the beginning and end of this story. How does her view of God and her own life change?
3. The period of the Judges was marked by weak faith and irresponsible living, but this foreign woman gives hope. What specific examples of strong faith and responsible living can you find in the characters of Ruth and Boaz?
4. The story of Ruth demonstrates laws that God had given Israel to take care of marginalized people (Deut. 25:5-10, Lev. 25:25, Lev. 19:9-10). What do these laws and customs reveal about the heart of God for the poor, the widow, and the orphan? How could your group care for the less fortunate and thereby reflect the heart of God?
5. The love story of Ruth and Boaz stands in contrast to many of the "love" stories we hear today. What can single men and women learn from their example (note Ruth's reputation in the community)?
6. Redemption is a key theme in this story. The redeemer must have the right, the resources, and the resolve. What does it mean to be redeemed? How does Boaz's redeeming of Ruth compare to our redemption found in Christ?
7. What some people might call coincidence others call divine providence. What are some key examples of God's divine providence in this story?

SUPPORT (15 min)

Share & Pray: Who or what in your life still needs God's redemption? Pray that God would redeem them and use you to be His agent of redemption.