

Small Group Questions | February 10, 2019

The Great Explorers — Ruth

Ruth 1:1–18

Context: Ruth chapters 1–4

Other Passages Referenced: Gen 2:24, 19:30–38; Num 22:1–6, 25:1–3; Judges 3:12–14, 21:5; Matt 1:1–6, 15–16

Introductory Comments to Group Leaders:

The main emphasis of the Book of Ruth, and thus of this week's sermon covering the entire four chapters, is how God's hesed—covenant love/covenant faithfulness—was carried out through the hesed of Ruth and Boaz. Ruth's hesed love was most evident in the way she made a covenant vow to leave her own homeland and family of origin to show hesed to her mother-in-law Naomi. Boaz demonstrated hesed in honoring his deceased relatives by making sure their land was held in the family and by marrying Ruth to care for her and hopefully provide an heir on behalf of his deceased relative. By extension, he also honored and cared for Naomi. The word "hesed" is found in Ruth 1:8, 2:20, 3:10.

God's providence is part of His hesed covenant faithfulness. The following summary may be helpful:

The same hand that had sent the famine (1:1) and later provided food (1:6) is the hand that had brought Naomi and Ruth to Bethlehem precisely at the beginning of the harvest (1:22) and has now guided Ruth to that portion of the field belonging specifically to Boaz. In long-range terms the royal line of David would not be (pre)served if the man at whose field Ruth arrived was gracious but from outside the clan; he could not have functioned as a "kinsman redeemer," preserving the name and family of the deceased. Conversely, the line would not have been served if Ruth had indeed found the field of her deceased husband's (and father-in-law's) kinsman, but he turned out to be a rogue, shooing off aliens, orphans, and widows. In the providence of God, the man she meets is indeed a gracious near kinsman.¹

We want to try to keep the group's discussion focused on the sermon's emphasis that God used Ruth's hesed commitment to bring about the birth of King David and ultimately the birth of King Jesus. However, the key parts of the narrative hinge on some relatively obscure legal concepts related to the redeemer kinsman and levirate marriage. We'll aim to give enough background to show their relation to the covenant hesed of God, Ruth, and Boaz without getting bogged down in the details. We ultimately want to get to the covenant that God has made with us through Jesus to consider His hesed toward us and our own hesed, or lack thereof, toward Him.

Background Helps

The Ephrathites – Ephratah was the ancient name of the region around the town of Bethlehem. Those from Bethlehem were also known as Ephrathites. It is worth noting that Bethlehem literally means "house of bread," but the Book of Ruth begins with a family of Ephrathites going to temporarily sojourn in Moab because Bethlehem was experiencing a famine. You may recall earlier sermons related to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob where Israel suffered famine and families sojourned in Egypt or other countries where food was more available.

The Moabites – "The move to Moab must be interpreted in light of the general Israelite disposition toward the Moabites. That disposition seems to have been colored by five factors in their history: (1) the Moabites' contemptible origins in the incestuous relationship of Lot and his daughter (Gen 19:30–38); (2) the Moabites' resistance to Israelite passage through their territory when they came from Egypt (Numbers 22–24); (3) the Moabite women's seduction of the Israelites and the latter's subsequent punishment (Num 25:1–9); (4) Israel's constitutional exclusion of Moab from the assembly of the LORD (Deut 23:3–6); and (5) the recent oppression of the Israelites by Eglon the king of Moab (Judg 3:15–30). This combination of factors may explain the impression created by the narrator that of the Bethlehemites only

¹ Daniel Isaac Block, *Judges, Ruth*, vol. 6, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 654.

Elimelech's family sought refuge from the famine in Moab. They also render even more remarkable the whole-hearted acceptance of Ruth successively by Naomi, Boaz, and the people of Bethlehem."²

Barley Season in Ephratah – The beginning of barley harvest is usually March or April and the threshing of the barley is late May or June. That means the events from Ruth's meeting of Boaz to his actions as a near kinsman occurred over a 3–4 month period.

The Concept of a "near kinsman" (Hebrew *gō'ēl*) – "As a kinship term it denotes the near relative who is responsible for the economic well-being of a relative, and he comes into play especially when the relative is in distress and cannot get himself/herself out of the crisis. The Scriptures note five aspects of a *gō'ēl*'s redemptive role: (1) to ensure that the hereditary property of the clan never passes out of the clan (Lev 25:25–30); (2) to maintain the freedom of individuals within the clan by buying back those who have sold themselves into slavery because of poverty (Lev 25:47–55); (3) to track down and execute murderers of near relatives (Num 35:12, 19–27); (4) to receive restitution money on behalf of a deceased victim of a crime (Num 5:8); and (5) to ensure that justice is served in a lawsuit involving a relative (Job 19:25; Ps 119:154; Jer 50:34). The Israelite provision for the *gō'ēl* is based upon an assumption of corporate solidarity and the sanctity of the family/clan: to offend a relative is to offend oneself. The custom of redemption was designed to maintain the wholeness and health of family relationships, even after the person has died."³

Levirate Marriage – We'll see Boaz extend the application of Deut 25:5–10 known as Levirate Marriage. The basic idea is that if a man dies without an heir, his brother should marry the widow in an effort to give offspring on behalf of the deceased brother. Although there was one nearer kinsman than Boaz who was willing to redeem the land, that man was unwilling to marry Ruth. Neither Boaz nor the nearer kinsman was a brother of Ruth's deceased husband so neither had a legal obligation to marry her. However, Boaz extended the concept of Levirate Marriage along with the concept of the near kinsman as reasons to marry Ruth.

Sermon Recap: Ruth is an explorer whose commitment leads us to the king. We see 3 facets of Ruth's commitment: 1. It was costly (1:8), 2. It was complete (1:17), and 3. Ruth was committed to the common (2:1–3, 23, 3:5). As a result, God led this Gentile explorer of Moabite ethnicity to become the great grandmother of King David. Beyond that, her name also appears in the lineage of King Jesus. God's choosing of the Moabite Ruth reveals His grace and His concern to save people from every people group of the world.

Hook: *A Question to Help Ignite Conversation*

Which do you prefer, the beach or the mountains?

Look:

Read Judges 21:25 – Ruth 1:18

1. Ruth 1:1 provides much of the context for the rest of the book. What do we learn in verse one about the time, place(s), and conditions surrounding the narrative?
2. Why did Naomi insist that her two widowed daughters-in-law remain in Moab instead of going back to Bethlehem with her?
3. What covenant promises do you see in Ruth 1:14–18?

² Daniel Isaac Block, *Judges, Ruth*, vol. 6, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 650.

³ Daniel Isaac Block, *Judges, Ruth*, vol. 6, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 674–675.

Illustrations:

Illustrations and quotes can be found on the “Sermon Slides” link at the bottom of www.wcchapel.org

Took: *Applying the message to our lives.*

Practical Applications:

1. When is commitment most difficult for you?—when commitment is costly, when commitment must be complete, or when commitment is to the common?
2. If hesed is a “fierce covenant fidelity that finds us keeping loyalty to the covenant precisely when it seems most difficult or threatened,” what are some current demonstrations of hesed in the context of the covenant God has invited us into through Jesus?
3. The concept of hesed in Ruth is demonstrated by the often-costly commitment to share responsibility for other extended family members. We see this in the concepts of the near kinsman and especially in Levirate Marriage. Hypothetically, how do you see the story of Naomi and Ruth playing out in our individualistic culture? Would King David have had a chance to be conceived?
4. Certainly our culture is different today from that of ancient Israel, but how might we address the concerns that prompted God to initiate the near kinsman provisions?

Verse (You might consider memorizing this one): “And he (Abraham) believed the Lord and he counted it to him as righteousness.” Genesis 15:6

Prayer:

- Please spend time praying for one another.

What we hope members glean from the passage.

1. Context
 - a. Time – during the days when the judges ruled which would have been before Israel had a king.
 - b. Places – Began in Bethlehem in Judah and moved to Moab.
 - c. Conditions – famine in Bethlehem.
2. They were 3 widows. Naomi saw herself as beyond childbearing age but thought Ruth and Orpah might remarry more easily in Moab. A woman without a husband or children in their situation was in economic peril.
3. Ruth 1:15–18 is often read at weddings and although Ruth was not entering a marriage covenant with Naomi, the commitments she made to her mother-in-law constituted a covenant that has many parallels with the marriage covenant. In 1:14 Ruth “clung to” Naomi which is the same word used in Gen 2:24 – “hold fast to” or “cleave to” his wife. Ruth covenanted to make Naomi’s people her people, to make where Naomi lodged where she would lodge, and to make Naomi’s God her God, and to die where Naomi would die. Then Ruth swore an oath saying, “May the Lord do so to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you.”