

The Book of Ruth

Lesson 1: Loss in Moab and Ruth's Loyal Love -- Ruth 1:1-22

Picture a town named Bethlehem, which means "house of bread," with empty cupboards and cracked fields. The famine has come, and a man named Elimelech makes a decision that seems perfectly reasonable. He packs up his wife and his two boys and heads east, away from the house of bread, toward the fields of Moab. We have all made that kind of choice, the practical one, the one that feels like survival. We do not always pause to ask where the road is leading. And so the story of Ruth opens not with a miracle or a trumpet blast, but with an ordinary family making an ordinary move in a hard season, never dreaming what God was weaving in the background.

What follows is the kind of sorrow that visits real families. Elimelech dies. Naomi, a widow now in a foreign land, watches her sons Mahlon and Chilion marry Moabite women, Orpah and Ruth, and then she buries those sons too. Read it slowly. In the space of a few verses, a wife loses her husband and a mother loses both her children. If you have ever stood at a graveside, you know that the Bible is not exaggerating when it lets Naomi say later, "the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me." This is not a tidy story. It is an honest one, and that is precisely why it can hold our honest grief.

Then, into the gray of that grief, comes one of the most beautiful confessions of loyalty in all of Scripture. When Naomi turns to go home and urges her daughters-in-law to stay in Moab, Orpah kisses her and turns back, but Ruth clings. "Whither thou goest, I will go," she says, "and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God." A Moabite woman, an outsider with no obligation and no advantage, chooses Naomi, chooses Israel, chooses the LORD. Watch her closely in this lesson, because in Ruth we see what loyal love looks like, and we catch an early glimpse of the God who welcomes the outsider who comes to take refuge under His wings.

They come home to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest, and Naomi arrives empty-handed and aching. "Call me not Naomi, call me Mara," she says, "for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me." But notice the timing. They arrive exactly when the harvest is beginning. The woman who says she is empty has, walking beside her, the very person God will use to fill her again. That is how God so often works, quietly, behind the ordinary, through the loyal love of one faithful person. As we open this study, bring your own losses and your own loyalties, and let us watch how God meets the grieving and turns emptiness into fullness.

Group Discussion: When Naomi returned to Bethlehem she said, "I went out full, and the LORD hath brought me home again empty" (Ruth 1:21). As a group, talk about a time when life felt empty, and where, looking back, you can now see God was quietly at work even when you could not feel Him.

Personal Reflection: Ruth said to Naomi, “thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God” (Ruth 1:16). Where in your own life is God asking you to make a costly, loyal commitment, to a person, to His people, or to Him, that you have been holding back?

Read Ruth 1:1–22

Study Questions

1. The story opens “in the days when the judges ruled” with “a famine in the land” (Ruth 1:1). What does the Bible teach about how God uses hard providences and even our ordinary decisions to accomplish His purposes, and how can we trust His hand without excusing our own responsibility for the choices we make?
2. Elimelech moved his family from Bethlehem, the “house of bread,” to Moab to escape the famine (Ruth 1:1–2). When you face a hard season, are you more likely to run toward a quick fix or to stay and trust God where He has placed you? Name a present situation where you feel that tug.
3. In a few short verses Naomi loses her husband and both her sons (Ruth 1:3–5). What does Scripture teach us about how God regards the grieving and the widow, and what does this passage show us about facing real loss without pretending it does not hurt?
4. Naomi later says, “the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me” (Ruth 1:20). Have you ever been honest with God about your bitterness or sorrow? What keeps you from bringing your raw grief to Him, and what might change if you did?
5. Naomi heard “that the LORD had visited his people in giving them bread” and rose to return home (Ruth 1:6). What does this teach about repentance and returning, about turning back

toward God and His people when we have wandered, and why does God meet the returning heart?

6. Naomi urged her daughters-in-law to go back, but Ruth clung to her (Ruth 1:14). Who in your life has shown you this kind of clinging, loyal love, and to whom is God calling you to be that steadfast, present friend right now?
7. Ruth declared, “thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God” (Ruth 1:16). What does Scripture teach about the nature of true, trusting, obedient faith, and how does Ruth’s confession show that real faith involves both a turning of the heart and a binding commitment?
8. Ruth left behind her homeland, her gods, and her people to follow Naomi and the LORD (Ruth 1:16–17). What have you had to leave behind to follow God, and what might He still be asking you to release in order to walk fully with Him?
9. Ruth was a Moabite, an outsider with no claim on Israel, yet she came to take refuge under the God of Israel and was later named in the lineage of David and of Christ (Ruth 1:16; 4:17–22; Matthew 1:5). What does her inclusion reveal about the breadth of God’s grace toward the outsider who believes, and how does this quiet story in Bethlehem point forward to the gospel for all nations?

10. Look back across the whole chapter, the famine, the losses, Ruth's loyalty, and Naomi's bitter homecoming at the dawn of harvest. Name one specific way Jesus is using this passage to form you, to deepen your trust, soften your grief, or stir your loyal love, and what is one concrete step you will take this week in response?

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: Matthew 1:5, Ruth named among the mothers of the Messiah; Psalm 91:4, taking refuge under God's wings; Romans 8:28, God working all things together for good to those who love Him; Acts 14:17, God leaving witness to the nations by giving rain and fruitful seasons; James 1:27, pure religion visiting the widow in her affliction

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