

RUTH

We begin our study of Ruth with a look at the first chapter of the book. The story of Ruth is one which illustrates how God's will is worked out in the lives of ordinary people doing ordinary things. Ruth became the great grandmother of King David, and that she was a Moabite woman, not a Jew. Isn't it interesting that the "Lion of Judah" has in his ancestry a Moabite, among others. This was God's way of blessing people outside the Jewish community who put their faith in Him.

The story takes place near the end of the times of the Judges, a period when the Jews were known for idol worship, worldly living, selfishness, and condoning all manner of wicked lifestyles. It is within this perverted and wicked environment that Naomi and Ruth will return to Bethlehem seeking help in their time of need. Little did they know that Boaz would become their kinsman redeemer and that, later, God would send Samuel, the first prophet who would anoint Saul the first king of a united Israel; and then Saul's son David, the great grandson of Ruth. It is no wonder, given the harvest theme which surrounds Ruth and Boaz, that the Jews traditionally read this book each year at the Feast of Weeks, i.e., Pentecost.

Read Ruth Chapter 1 and answer the following:

1. Re-read verses Ruth 1:1-5. Can you imagine what Naomi must have felt like? How long had they lived in Moab? Who supported her while she lived there? What had now happened to that support? (see Ruth 1:5)
 - a. ANSWER: Naomi and her family lived in Moab ten years. By the end of that time, Naomi had lost her husband and then both of her sons—her source of support after the death of her husband. This meant that she no longer had any source of support; she was now a widow with two daughters living in a foreign land.
2. Naomi left Bethlehem with a healthy husband and two sons. Now who does she have? (see Ruth 1:5) Does she have any means to care for herself or her family? What skills did she have?
 - a. ANSWER: Naomi has no visible means of support and no skills that we know of. In addition, we know that Naomi was now old and did not want her daughters to be dependent on her.
3. In the land in those days, the custom was that if a brother died and left a wife, the living brother should take the widow for his wife, father a son, and name it after the deceased brother. In this way, the family's land and heritage could be passed unbroken from generation to generation. Which verses in Ruth Chapter 1 apply to this custom?
 - a. ANSWER: The verses that apply in Chapter 1 are
 - i. Ruth 1:3-5
 - ii. Ruth 1:11-13
 - iii. Ruth 1:20-21
4. Who decided to take Naomi up on this custom and return her to her husband's brother? (see Ruth 1:14)
 - a. ANSWER: Ruth. She was determined to return with Naomi to Naomi's homeland where Naomi's husband's relatives would be responsible for her.
5. In Ruth 1:15-18, Ruth pleads with Naomi to let her stay with her, and to go where she goes. Ruth also says something that sheds great light on Naomi: "Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God". How did Ruth know who Naomi's God was? Is she making a profession of faith in the God of Israel? What do you suppose led her to do that?
 - a. ANSWER: Clearly Naomi's faith in her God over the ten years that she had lived in the foreign land of Moab had spoken to Ruth. Unlike Ruth's sister, Orpah, Ruth wanted nothing to do with the gods of Moab; rather, she put all of her faith in the one true God.
6. Naomi leaves Bethlehem with a husband and two sons, and returns many years later a widow with a daughter-in-law who is also a widow. (See Ruth 1:19) Is it any wonder that the town's folk were abuzz with gossip and questions? Do you suppose that this is another good example of people judging only by what they can see on the outside? Do you suppose any of them asked what God's will might be in Naomi's and Ruth's lives now that they had returned to Bethlehem? Are we guilty of the same thing, i.e., judging on appearance?
 - a. ANSWER: Ruth 1:19 reflects an interesting picture that we, living in a western culture, might not fully appreciate. Here is a picture of not one, but two, widows returning home. They were not warmly welcomed. People in those times wondered what it was that God had against both Naomi and Ruth, such that He would cause the death of both husbands, and leave them with no means of support. Seen as outcasts by their status as widows, they were not warmly welcomed. It is just as true today— we are quick to judge based on appearances and man's way of thinking. With no one lovingly concerned about them, it was indeed a difficult time in the life of Naomi and Ruth.

7. Is Naomi happy regarding her condition? Does she see that anything good can come from all the calamity in her life? Do you suppose she believes God has forgotten her, or has simply cast her aside? As we close Chapter 1, do verses 21 and 22 indicate any hope on Naomi's part that God is watching over her? How do you suppose her testimony about God looked to the others that were around her at that time? And yet the harvest was just beginning.
- a. ANSWER: Naomi has no hope, and feeling abandoned by God, she believes that she has no future. God has dealt bitterly with her. Little does she realize what God's plan really was, and what blessings were just around the corner. We can learn from Naomi that anytime we suffer difficult times and cannot see anything positive in our situation, God is still there watching over us. We can easily get caught up in our misery and not realize that God has a plan for us, even in difficult times.
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May God bless you this week as you faithfully study His Word.

In Christ,

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