

Faithful God

A Study of Ruth

Introduction

Ruth tells the story of the love and marriage between two exemplary people: Boaz and Ruth. The values of the commonplace and domestic are affirmed while serving the larger purpose of showing how God uses everything from human love to tragedy to display His glory and achieve His merciful plan to redeem His people. Ruth is the Bible's most complete love story. Values such as loyalty, faithfulness, and compassion are given both feminine and masculine expressions through the main characters. There is also an unflinching look into the heart-breaking consequences of sin. Ultimately, though, the main character is God who is unalterably faithful to His promises and plans. "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose" (Rom. 8:28).

Key Doctrines and Themes

- *Providence* – God is sovereign over all of his creatures and their actions. He designs and guides all events toward his appointed end. God designs both pleasant and painful circumstances to accomplish His purposes in His people's lives.
- *Redemption* – The theme of "kinsman redeemer" which foreshadows Christ is most fully explained in Ruth. It is extraordinary that Ruth, a Moabite and former pagan, finds her way, by God's providence into the lineage of Jesus.
- *Ethics of Covenant Living* – There are clear moral dimensions in Ruth. In the early verses we see the tragic results of unfaithfulness to God. However, through Ruth and Boaz we see how God loves and blesses generosity and kindness toward the marginalized.
- *Love and marriage are good things* – God blesses faithful, romantic love and marriage.

Messages In This Series

- 1 – The Road to Nowhere (1:1-5)
- 2 – Relentless Grace (1:6-22)
- 3 – God Our Refuge (2:1-23)
- 4 – There is a Redeemer (3:1-18)
- 5 – Mission Accomplished (4:1-22)

Recommended Resources:

Esther & Ruth by Iain Duguid (*Reformed Expository Commentary*)

Faithful God by Sinclair Ferguson

From Famine to Fullness by Dean Ulrich (*The Gospel According to the Old Testament*)

A Sweet and Bitter Providence by John Piper

Part 1 – “The Road to Nowhere”

Ruth 1:1-5

1. God is in Control.

- V. 1
- From the opening words of Ruth we begin to see God’s redemptive purpose at work. The clause, “In the days when the judges ruled,” is not simply a way to date the book of Ruth. It is rather a redemptive-historical description of the times in which these events took place. We are told in Judges 21:25 that everyone did what was right in their own eyes because there was no king in the land.
- The judges were people like you and me. They were sinners and some of them like Samson were deeply flawed. But nevertheless they served the purpose of pointing toward a Deliverer who would be all that the judges could only hint at. This ultimate Deliverer would save the people of God once and for all.
- In addition to the *timing* of these events (the time of the judges) we also see God’s redemptive purposes surfacing in the locale referenced in verse one – Bethlehem. According to Judges 21 we know that these events are happening at a time “when there was no king in Israel.” Yet the story of Ruth begins and ends in the very town where Israel’s greatest king (David) would be raised and where the King of kings would be born.

2. Man Stubbornly Resists God.

- V. 1b-2
- Elimelech, his wife Naomi, and their two sons Mahlon and Chilion face a turning point. They can stay in Bethlehem where there is famine or they can go to a place where they have heard there is plenty of food. Elimelech makes the choice to leave Bethlehem and go to another land in order to provide for his family. To our understanding that makes sense. It is the reasonable, even the moral thing to do. But if we understand the context we see Elimelech, far from doing the right thing, is actually leading his family down the road to nowhere. This family is forsaking the only place on earth that God has specifically given to His people.

3. God is Gracious.

- V. 4
- In defiance against God’s clear prohibition, Mahlon and Chilion married pagan wives. This was sin, pure and simple. But God was at work. One of those pagan women is named Ruth and she winds up in the lineage of Jesus Christ.
- We can be a lot like Elimelech and Naomi. It’s a strong temptation to abandon God’s promises for the world’s provision especially during times when the bread of heaven seems scarce. And so the option of choosing the land of compromise seems, at times, very viable to us. But in the storyline of Ruth we come to find our own storyline – God’s redemptive purpose, Our flight from God because of our rebellious hearts, and finally, the unseen gracious providence of God which brings about His will even when we rebel.