

In the Midst of Naomi's Tragedy, God Demonstrated His Care and Sovereignty.

FIRST THOUGHTS:

The book of Judges focused primarily on the work of men. Aside from the ministry of Deborah, all of the judges were male. Yet, at a time and in a world dominated by heroes, a heroine by the name of Ruth emerged. In fact, the Bible book that bears her name is one of only two in the Scriptures (along with Esther) named after a woman. And while many of the men mentioned in Judges were broken and flawed by the cycle of sin, Ruth provided a breath of spiritual fresh air. What's more, this encouraging protagonist was not just a female. She also was a Gentile, a native of Moab who made an amazing impact on Jewish history. On the surface, this book provides a beautiful love story about a wealthy Jewish man and a poor Moabite widow. On a deeper level, it illustrates the extent God will go to provide for all people, Jew and Gentile, especially in times of sorrow. As you study this session, recall a season of physical or spiritual distress. How did God reveal Himself in that time? Did God care and provided for you with His great sovereignty? Did He see you through? Our God watches over us and in Deuteronomy 32:11 it says God is *"As an eagle that protects its nest, That flutters over its young"*. God covers us with His wings and provides for us even in the midst of grief, sorrow, and the fear of the unknown. We can depend on God when we face an uncertain future.

UNDERSTANDING THE CONTEXT:

The period of the judges was characterized by an ongoing cycle of rebellion, retribution, repentance and restoration—a repetitive saga of poor choices and painful consequences. The book of Ruth begins on a somber note by describing two unfortunate events, one national and the other personal. First, Israel experienced a famine. Because of this particular famine, a resident of Bethlehem named Elimelech, along with his wife Naomi and their two sons, left Judah to find food in Moab. While in Moab, Elimelech died, triggering the second tragedy. To make matters worse, his two married sons passed away as well. Before their untimely deaths, Naomi's two sons each married Moabite women: Orpah and Ruth. Jews were not supposed to marry Gentiles, especially Ammonites and Moabites. The book of Ruth comes toward the end of the judges' rule over Israel just before the start of Israel's reign of kings. Ruth reminds us that God's providence and faithfulness will not fail no matter how dark the times. . . . The story is one of tragic loss, deep loyalty, and God's faithfulness to Ruth, a foreigner who trusted Him. As the story unfolds, Ruth decided to remain with Naomi after the loss of her husband. She followed Naomi and God into an unknown future and found God faithful through every trial and hardship." Despite being a Gentile, Ruth eventually became the great-grandmother of King David, which also placed her in the genealogy of Jesus (Matt. 1:5). In this lesson we will see how God can take a mess and make a miracle in order to advance His kingdom plans. Our God can be trusted no matter our circumstances. Hallelujah 🙌

KEY DOCTRINE: God

God is all powerful and all knowing; and His perfect knowledge extends to all things, past, present, and future, including the future decisions of His free creatures. (See Proverbs 16:33; Romans 8:28.)

MEMORY VERSE: Ruth 1:16

But Ruth replied: Don't plead with me to abandon you or to return and not follow you. For wherever you go, I will go, and wherever you live, I will live; your people will be my people, and your God will be my God.

Loss (Ruth 1:11–15) • Believers will suffer loss.

Initially, Naomi's daughters-in-law, Ruth and Orpah, were determined to travel with her back to Bethlehem. Yet, she urged them to return home to their Moabite families. Naomi used emphatic language three times in urging her daughters-in-law to go back (vv. 11, 12, 13). Her initial question—Why do you want to go with me?—assumes that the younger women would experience no benefits in coming with Naomi to Israel. But it also includes a sense of rebuke, as if Naomi considered the idea of the women coming with her as absolute foolishness. At first, both daughters-in-law rejected Naomi's directions to head back home. Ruth and Orpah each insisted that they would return with Naomi. However, Naomi's stronger appeal apparently convinced Orpah to return home. In contrast to Orpah, Ruth clung to Naomi. Naomi made a third attempt to convince Ruth to leave. but Ruth clung to Naomi; and, in doing so, she was taking early steps toward a meaningful relationship with the God of Israel.

Loyalty (Ruth 1:16–18) • We need to allow others to minister to us.

Ruth boldly said “no” to her mother-in-law. Ruth’s speech can be divided into three primary sections. First the Moabite’s plea to Naomi: *“Don’t plead with me to abandon you”*. Orpah was gone, but Ruth had no desire to return to her past. She begged Naomi to stop challenging her desire to make the journey to Israel. Ruth offered a poetic statement of loyalty to her mother-in-law. She would go wherever Naomi wanted to go and live wherever Naomi wanted to live. Ruth had experienced the ups and downs of life with Naomi; and whatever the future held, they would face it together. A move to Israel meant a clean break from Moab and the Moabite culture and religion. Naomi’s people would become Ruth’s people, and Naomi’s God would become Ruth’s God. The pledge to live with Naomi was a promise of companionship, while the pledge to follow Naomi’s God was a promise of commitment. The next portion of Ruth’s declaration of loyalty takes the conversation to a new level. Ruth promised to be with her mother-in-law until the very end. She would die where Naomi died, and she would be buried wherever Naomi was buried. In addition to painting an incredible picture of lifelong devotion, Ruth’s words reveal a strong sense of familial connection. Naomi’s immediate family was gone. Her other daughter-in-law had returned to Moab. Ruth valued her role in the family and would never leave Naomi. The final section of Ruth’s speech includes a similar form of divine witness: *“May the Lord punish me, and do so severely”*, here, Ruth used the covenant name of God (Yahweh); suggesting she understood God as a living entity who moved in the lives of His people. The condition for His judgment would be if anything but death separates you and me. Again, Ruth focused on a long-term commitment. All of Naomi’s arguments melted away in the light of Ruth’s statement of fidelity. Faced with such bold and firm allegiance, Naomi stopped talking to her. Ruth had made her point.

Provision (Ruth 2:5–12) • Believers can be confident in God’s sovereign ability to provide for our needs.

Naomi and Ruth returned to Bethlehem. Still feeling stung by God, Naomi told her old friends to call her Mara (“bitter”) rather than Naomi (“pleasant”). Yet, in the midst of Naomi’s pity party, God responded with grace through Ruth. Despite being a Gentile and new to Jewish laws, Ruth took advantage of gleaning, where workers allowed the poor to gather grain dropped during the harvest. (Lev. 19:9–10). In God’s providence, Ruth began her work in the fields of Boaz, a member of Elimelech’s family. Boaz (meaning “in him is strength”) asked his overseer, *“Whose young woman is this?”* Boaz’s servant gave him a quick rundown on what he knew about Ruth. The servant next explained that Ruth had sought permission to gather fallen grain and that she had been on her feet since early morning with only a brief rest. Once she had secured permission to glean, Ruth had demonstrated an incredible work ethic. After hearing Ruth’s story, Boaz initiated a conversation with her: *“Listen, my daughter.”* Boaz gave Ruth instructions. She should not go to another field to glean. Boaz was extending his security over her, probably out of respect for Naomi and in recognition of Ruth’s character. Next, she should remain close to his female servants. Then, Ruth could rest assured that Boaz’s young men would not harass her. He had ordered them to leave her alone. Finally, she could drink from the jars prepared for Boaz’s field workers. It would have been extraordinary for a Gentile to share water with Jews. Ruth bowed to the ground in a demonstration of humility and gratitude. Though she was a foreigner, God was providing for the needs of her family. Boaz was happy to be an instrument of God’s grace in this matter because of all Ruth had done for her mother-in-law. She had placed herself under God’s wings of care, and He was providing a full reward for her loyalty and character.

APPLICATION:

1. It is true that even as believers we still have pain and sorrow in this life. God never promised we would not have trouble but your present sorrows and troubles will never have the last word over your life because you are a believer. Even in our darkest hour, God is quietly doing His deepest work. There are times when you can’t see God working, BUT, He is *working behind the scenes*. ***There is work God does on our hearts in times of pain that would not happen in other times of our life.***
2. God will always send someone to help you. It may be to stand by your side, it may be a word of encouragement, or it may be an affirmation of what God has spoken to you. When God sends help, let God help you. Let your response be with gratitude and humility.
3. God is our ultimate Provider! He uses others to serve as His hands and feet along the way. *Jeremiah 29:11*, *“I have it all planned out—plans to take care of you, not abandon you, plans to give you the future you hope for”*

Next Week: Redemption Ruth 3 & 4