

The Book of Ruth

Part 1 Introduction

TALKINGPOINTS WALKINGPOINTS

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Talk together about the glory of God's kingdom. –Psalm 145:11
Love the Lord your God and **walk** in all his ways. –Joshua 22:5

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

Starter Question

- From Sunday's sermon, what did you *like best*, or what *caught your attention most*—and *why*?

Observation—*What does it say?*

- Pastor Doug noted that **kindness** and **redemption** are key themes in the delightful little Book of Ruth. Ruth can be read in just 15 minutes, so choose four volunteers to read one chapter aloud. Divide the remainder of the group into two, each making a list of passages which support one of those themes.

Now, share and discuss the evidences of kindness and redemption you found.

Interpretation—*What does it mean?*

- WebstersDictionary1828.com defines "**kindness**" as "*acts of good will which promote the happiness or welfare of others*" and "**redemption**" as "*the act of procuring the deliverance of persons or things from the possession and power of others through payment.*" Compare and contrast the costliness of the acts of kindness and redemption you found in Ruth.
- React to this statement: "Redemption is a form of kindness." Do you agree or disagree—and why?
- What unanswered questions regarding kindness or redemption arise after this brief overview?

Application—*What do I do with this?*

- Who can tell about a costly kindness you've received?
Who, what, where, when, why, how? Be specific.
- Who can tell about an act of redemption you've experienced personally?
Who, what, where, when, why, how? Be specific.
- The book of Ruth took place during the biblical period described in the Book of Judges (Ruth 1:1). What do you know about that period? (If you're unsure, ChatGPT can describe that time period.)

How does such a historical context make kindness and redemption all the more necessary?

Sermon Summary

Overview of the Book of Ruth

Today we are beginning a study of the Biblical book of Ruth, which is set in the time period of the Judges. This was a time of chaos and warfare. But the story of Ruth shows us that despite all that chaos and corruption, there were notable instances of selfless love and godly chivalry. Not everyone had abandoned Israel's God. Ruth's story is a reminder that even the darkest times in history may not be as bleak as they appear.

Setting—The story is mainly set in the town of Bethlehem of Judah—the hometown of David and the birthplace of Jesus (Matthew 2:1–6; John 7:42). The narrative opens explaining how a famine in Judah drove Naomi's husband, Elimelech, to move his family to Moab. The story of Ruth describes events which occurred during the period of the Judges which roughly corresponds to events which occurred somewhere around 1250–1050 BC.

Date—Ruth 4:17 mentions King David and his genealogy (4:18–22). This places the writing of Ruth after David's accession to the throne which occurred in c. 1010 B.C. (2 Samuel 2). The tradition of the church tells us that the book of Ruth could have been written any time after David's accession to the throne in 1010 B.C.

Authorship—We don't know! The author is never named in the Bible. According to rabbinic tradition (Babylonian Talmud, Baba Bathra 14a–15b), Samuel is the author. But this is unlikely, since Samuel died before David became king, and Ruth 4:17–22 implies that David's kingship was an established fact at the time of writing.

The book of Ruth serves as a bridge between the lawless era of the Judges—when everyone did what was right in their own eyes (Judges 17:6; 21:25)—and the era of Israel's monarchy—where kings became a thing! In the patriarchal culture of ancient Israel, a childless widow like Ruth would have survived at the lowest levels of society. However, due to her faithfulness to her mother-in-law Naomi, and her marriage to Boaz, Ruth was able to move from the margins of society into the mainstream. She moved from being reviled to being revered!

Key Themes— **① Kindness:** Ruth and Boaz's acts of kindness reflect the kindness or "steadfast love" that God consistently shows to His people throughout the Scriptures (cf. Exodus 15:13; Deuteronomy 7:8–9; Psalm 103:4; 106:7 & 10; 136:10–15). **② Redemption:** The book of Ruth describes two legal institutions which are at the heart of the story. They are: (1) property redemption (Leviticus 25:23–25) by a near kinsman and (2) "levirate" marriage (Deuteronomy 25:5–6).

Takeaways from Ruth—

- ① God will not allow His promises to Israel and Judah and David to fail.
- ② God works in mysterious, often behind the scenes, ways to bring about His purposes.
- ③ In all things God works for the good of those who love Him and are called according to His purpose.
- ④ Genuine devotion expresses itself by showing sensitivity, grace, and kindness towards others.
- ⑤ God's grace knows no boundaries.

Major Divisions of the Book—In chapter one we see love's resolve, in chapter two we see love's response, in chapter 3 we see love's request, and in chapter 4 we see love's reward. As we dive into chapter 1, we are reminded of this very dark time in Israel's history. The Israelites had been in Egyptian captivity, and God delivered them by His great power. He brought them through the wilderness and eventually into the Promised land. You would think that this new generation of Israelites would serve God faithfully. But they did not. They would sin against God and would end in being oppressed by some foreign power. They would cry out to God who would send a deliverer. They would forget God and the cycle would repeat itself all over again!

The cities of Bethlehem and Moab are significant in leading up to Christ's birth. Bethlehem means "house of bread," and Judah means "praise." The story of Ruth begins and ends there. Verse one tells us that a certain man, along with his wife and sons, resided in the house of bread and praise, but he goes to sojourn in the country of Moab. In Psalm 108:9, God describes Moab as His washbasin.

Verse two tells us about the significance of their names. Naomi's name had positive connotations and their boys' names had sickly, weak meanings. In verses 3 and 4, we learn of the death of Elimelech and the intermarriage of Mahlon and Chilion. In Israel, intermarriage with foreigners was frowned upon—the fear being that such alliances would introduce false gods and evil practices (Deuteronomy 7:1–3) that would lead God's people away from him. As you will see, Ruth is a remarkable person.

Application Challenge—

- Read through the book of Ruth in one sitting at least three times this week.
- Take note of all the named characters in the book.
- Try to create a chart of the content, topics and verses of the Book of Ruth.
- Jot down any questions that arise in your mind as you read through the text.

Digging Deeper in your Daily Quiet Time

The Book of Ruth is a story of extraordinarily beautiful virtue taking place during the darkest, most debauched of times—the days of the Judges (Ruth 1:1). Let's explore Ruth's historical context, so we can find parallels to—and guidance for—our day.

Monday—It was a time of idolatry and abandonment of God.

- Read Judges 2:11-13, then skim the paragraph headings in the Book of Judges to see if you can observe "the cycle of the Judges".
- What is the significance of idolatrously abandoning God?



Tuesday—It was a time of moral, social and sexual corruption.

- Read Judges 19.
- What is the connection between idolatry and moral, social and sexual corruption?

Wednesday—It was a time of religious syncretism and corruption of worship.

- Read Judges 17-18.
- What does Leviticus 9:7 & 10:1-3 reveal about the seriousness of freestyle worship?

Thursday—It was a time of civil war and breakdown of national unity.

- Read Judges 20:1-48.
- Why do you think religious apostasy leads to societal breakdown?

Friday—It was a time of theological nihilism.

- Look up "nihilism" at <Dictionary.com>. What do you learn?
- Does "*doing what is right in one's own eyes*" (Judges 21:25) lead to **right living**?

Saturday—In what ways is our culture similar to "the days of the Judges"?

- What guidance do you receive from Matthew 5:16? What hope does it give you?