

RUTH

Eden to Exile Leader's Guide

John D. Morrison, PhD

OT LEADER'S GUIDE

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OT19

Greetings! Welcome to our journey through the Old Testament from Eden to Exile! I am so excited about what we are going to learn together and how we are going to grow together as we read God's Word together in these next twelve months.

Our reading the New Testament in a year as a church was a much broader and deeper success than we ever imagined. We saw God work in individuals and in relationships as his Word was made a daily priority. God tells us that his Word is powerful to accomplish his purposes (Isaiah 55:10-11), and we saw that on full display last year.

We believe that all of God's Word is, as Paul tells us, "able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 3:15). It is our commitment as a church to the whole counsel of God that has led us to read the Old Testament this year.

I am even more excited about this year because of a new and added "twist." Each week you'll read from the Old Testament, but you'll also find a devotional for the end of the week written by a member of our Lakewood Team. These devotionals will draw the connection between what you read each day and the New Testament. We are about to discover more regarding the unity of the Scriptures. God's Word tells us the one story of salvation freely offered through Jesus Christ.

Please keep current and encourage others to read along with you. I would love to hear your thoughts and impressions as you reflect on each day's reading. Please email me at tsmiley@lakewoodlife.org

We are blessed as a ministry to have such a talented, gifted, and doctrinally sound staff who each have the competency to lead us into a deeper understanding of God's Word. As you read their devotional thoughts and commentary, consider letting them know how their words have impacted your daily walk of faith.

Enjoy our journey from Eden to Exile!

Dr. Tom

INTRODUCTION

After Judges, the book of Ruth comes like a breath of fresh air. While we see the heartache caused by Israel's rebellion during this period, we finally come across commendable people. This brief narrative offers a glimpse of hope that the Lord is still working during the period of Judges despite all the sin of his people. In fact, the book relays how God is at work in ordinary, everyday life to bring about his extraordinary purposes. Through Ruth's line, God will bring David to be the king over his people. David, however, is not the end of the story, for Ruth points forward to David's Son, Jesus, who will come to be the true and final king over God's people.

Undergirding the whole story of Ruth is the concept of *hesed*. This Hebrew word is varyingly translated as faithfulness, love, and loving-kindness. As Daniel I. Block explains, no single English word can adequately express the fullness of this Hebrew word:

“This is a strong relational term that wraps up in itself an entire cluster of concepts, all the positive attributes of God — love, mercy, grace, kindness, goodness, benevolence, loyalty, covenant faithfulness; in short, that quality that moves a person to act for the benefit of another without respect to the advantage it might bring to the one who expresses it.”¹

The word first appears in 1:8, where Naomi blesses Ruth and Orpah, “May the Lord deal *kindly* with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me.” The book of Ruth is ultimately about God's *hesed* for his people, but his love and faithfulness transform his people to love as he loves.

Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz all manifest *hesed* at a human level. They show love, loyalty, kindness, and goodness to one another without regard for what they might gain through it. Ruth leaves the only land she had ever known and any other family she might have had in order to be faithful to Naomi. As Ruth famously tells her mother-in-law, “Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For

¹Daniel I. Block, *Judges, Ruth*, The New American Commentary, vol. 6 (Nashville: B&H, 1999, 605).

where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God” (Ruth 1:16). Ruth willingly embraces a vulnerable position in a strange land in order to love her mother-in-law. Naomi, too, exhibits love and faithfulness toward Ruth. Naomi’s care for Ruth is particularly evident in chapter 2 where she advises Ruth on how to survive in this new land and how to navigate the relationship with Boaz. In chapters 3 and 4, Boaz’s love and care for Ruth come to the fore. Ruth would not be a socially and economically beneficial marriage for Boaz. At least one of their sons, if they were to have any, would carry on the name of Ruth’s first husband. Along with Ruth, Boaz would have been obligated to take in Naomi as well. Yet, because of his love for Ruth, Boaz redeems her and marries her.

The Lord is at work through these displays of love and faithfulness to uphold his own love and faithfulness to his people. The book of Ruth demonstrates that despite how his people have rejected him during the period of Judges, God has not forsaken his people. Moreover, Ruth reminds us that the Lord does not lose sight of the outcast, the widow, the foreigner, or, in short, those who are vulnerable and on the fringes of society. The Lord shows us in Ruth that his grace is not constrained by national borders, but that his *hesed* extends even to those outside of Israel who will trust in him.

After the major military endeavors of Judges, the Lord demonstrates in Ruth that he also works through ordinary situations. Ruth, for example, just “happens” to go glean in Boaz’s field, who just “happens” to be one of her kinsmen redeemers. Remarkably, God is even able to redeem the tragedies of famine and death to bring about his good purposes. God works by his providence in the everydayness of life to fulfill his plan.

The Lord’s plan certainly involves his caring for Ruth and Naomi on a personal level. God uses Boaz to redeem Ruth, and so provides for both Ruth and Naomi. The end of the book shows that the Lord is working through Ruth’s life for the good of all his people. In the genealogy at the end of the book, we learn that the marriage of Boaz and Ruth will eventually lead to King David.

Judges ended in moral and spiritual chaos: “In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own

eyes” (Judges 21:25). Now, in Ruth, we learn that a king is coming to rule over God’s people.

New Testament Connection

As we continue reading in Scripture, the purpose of what God is doing through the life of Ruth continues to unfold. The promise of a king is partially fulfilled in David, but David proves himself to be nearly as corrupt as many of the Judges. The ultimate fulfillment of this kingly promise is Jesus Christ, the Son of David. Thus, the genealogy at the end of Ruth becomes a key part of the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew 1.

Applying Ruth Today

Ruth reminds us of the character of God. His love and faithfulness endure forever. Even in the face of his his people’s rebellion, he is working to redeem them. Ruth also shows us about God’s care for the vulnerable and the outcast. The Lord does not just provide for those on the margins of society, but he works through them to bring about his great purposes. He is always at work, even when we cannot see it.

The Lord’s grand purpose in Ruth is to bring about the birth of his Son Jesus. Certainly, he accomplished much else through her and through Boaz, but the storyline of Scripture points us to how Jesus came through their line. The book of Ruth points us to our ultimate need to be reconciled to God through Jesus Christ. We see in this book how God worked by his providence to bring about many good things such as provision and care for Naomi and Ruth and stability and unity for the whole nation through David. However, God’s ultimate purpose in their lives reminds us of our ultimate need. More than our physical needs or political stability, we need to know and to fellowship and to commune with our God.

Ruth highlights God’s love and faithfulness toward his people that will find its greatest expression in Jesus Christ. As Boaz redeemed Ruth, so Christ redeems his people and makes them his own. He takes his church as his bride.

As those who have been transformed by the Lord’s love, we are called to display that same love and faithfulness to others. Ruth,

Naomi, and Boaz all display love and faithfulness. If we have experienced these graces from God, we are called to show them to others. More than just being called to do it, if we are trusting in Christ, the Holy Spirit now lives inside of us and is working in our lives to enable us to do this. He takes our hearts of stone and gives us hearts of flesh that love God and love others.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

OT19 WEEKS 32-33

- Ruth 1:1-4 | What does the background of “when the judges ruled” tell us about the setting of this book? Consider Numbers 22-24 and Deuteronomy 7:1-6. In light of those passages, why are Orpah and Ruth unexpected wives for Mahlon and Chilion? Considering 2 Corinthians 6:14, does Deuteronomy 7:3-4 have any application for believers today?
- Ruth 1:16-18 | Why do we find Ruth’s loyalty and love so commendable? Given the history of the Moabites, what would have been particularly surprising about Ruth’s use of the name “LORD”? Can we infer anything from her calling God by his personal and covenantal name?
- Ruth 2:22-23 | What does this chapter and these verses in particular reveal about Ruth and Naomi’s state at this time? How vulnerable were they? How is the book of Ruth good news for the outcast, the vulnerable, and those on the fringes? How are we as believers called to be like Boaz in caring for those in need?
- Ruth 3:9-11 | The call to “spread your wings over your servant” is Ruth proposing marriage to Boaz. The woman proposing to the man would not have been typical in this culture. How would you describe Boaz’s reaction? Consider Ephesians 5:25-33. Why does God use the imagery of marriage to help explain Christ’s love for the church? What can we learn about Christ’s love for his people from this image? What can we learn about the nature of marriage from this?
- Ruth 4:1-6 | In the book of Ruth, what does it mean to “redeem” something or someone? How do Boaz’s actions help us better understand Christ’s work of redeeming his people? Consider Galatians 4:5, Titus 2:14, 1 Corinthians 6:20.
- Ruth 4:17-21 | How does this conclusion help us understand the purpose behind the writing of this book? Where does the story of Ruth tie in with overall story of Scripture?



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