

Surrounded by Death, Surrounded by Love

Naomi lost much in death, but she gained a new family member

Ruth 1

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Prelude:

I. The story of Ruth is one of the many hero stories of the Bible.

II. It has all the ingredients of a great narrative:

- A. Plot
- B. Characterization
- C. Setting
- D. Word Patterns
- E. Imagery
- F. Archetypes
- G. Allusions
- H. Dialogue
- I. Romance
- J. Devotion

III. It does not take place in a palace like the stories of Daniel or Esther, but

- A. in a home,
- B. in a field,
- C. in a community.

IV. There are journeys.

- A. Naomi's family travels from Israel to Moab,
- B. then she travels back to the land of Israel, and
 - 1. while there she and her daughter-in-law travel to Bethlehem, and
 - 2. Ruth from her homeland to a foreign land to Bethlehem to a man's field.

V. Ruth makes choices

- A. that not only take her away from her family and nation, but
- B. to another nation
 - 1. that just happens to be the nation God chose
 - 2. to bring the Savior into the world, and
 - a) she becomes part of that plan of God.
 - b) An obscure foreign woman helps to usher in something wonderful.

VI. The Place of the Book of Ruth in the Scheme of Redemption

- A. Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden shows what God wanted for humanity.
 - 1. However, through sin they ruined that plan of God.
 - 2. Nevertheless, He knew what they would do, and
 - a) right away He revealed to them a hint of what He would do,
 - b) destroying the one who had helped bring man down.
- B. Therefore, Genesis 3–11 shows what man does
 - 1. when he pursues his own agenda, and
 - 2. abandons the agenda of God.
 - a) However, God still wants paradise for those who love Him.
 - b) He found a man of faith, Abraham, and
 - (1) made a great promise to Him,

**3c “And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”
(Gen 12.3c)**

- (2) The story of Ruth shows more of God’s grand scheme.

Persuasion:

I. Ruth 1.1–2 – Can anything good come from a famine?

1 Now it came to pass, in the days when the judges ruled, that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of Bethlehem, Judah, went to dwell in the country of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons. 2 The name of the man

was Elimelech, the name of his wife was Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion—Ephrathites of Bethlehem, Judah. And they went to the country of Moab and remained there.

- A. The Book of Ruth starts off revealing a problem,
1. famine had struck the land of Israel.
 2. Does anything good ever come from suffering?
 - a) Consider whether anything good comes from famine.
 - b) Remember Joseph and why God sent him to Egypt.
- B. The Lord singled out this story from the Book of Judges, because
1. the opening verse shows us something that the first readers
 2. would not have known.
 - a) We already know the significance of who will be born in Bethlehem.
 - b) David, a descendant of Ruth, and then Jesus, a descendant of David,
 - (1) were born in that city, and
 - (2) that is all in keeping the promise to Abraham.
 - (a) Thus, the Book of Ruth shows the development
 - (b) of the promises God made to Abraham, starting in Gen 12.3.
- C. Remember the relationship between Israel and Moab.
1. How was Moab related to Israel?
 - a) Moab was the son of Lot and one of his daughters, and
 - b) Lot was the nephew of Abraham.
 - (1) Isaac and Lot were cousins.
 - (2) Jacob and Moab were second cousins.
 2. However, did they have a good relationship?
 - a) The Moabites called for Balaam to curse Israel.
 - b) And they had other problems between them.

D. Why does one family flee, but another stay?

1. You will see this throughout history.
2. For example, why did some people flee Nazi Germany, but others did not?
3. Why do some flee Mexico to come to America, but others do not?

E. Why did the family go to Moab?

1. Practically speaking, it was close and the situation was better there.
2. Divinely speaking, the Lord wanted to connect them to Ruth.

II. **Ruth 1.3–5 – Can anything good come from death?**

**3 Then Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died; and she was left, and her two sons.
4 Now they took wives of the women of Moab: the name of the one was Orpah, and the name of the other Ruth. And they dwelt there about ten years. 5
Then both Mahlon and Chilion also died; so the woman survived her two sons and her husband.**

A. Here the Bible focuses upon Naomi, and

1. the deaths in her family.
2. Some of you know her grief.

B. What is it like to lose your spouse?

C. What is it like to lose a child?

III. **Ruth 1.6–7 – The Lord visited the land of Judah**

6 Then she arose with her daughters-in-law that she might return from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the country of Moab that the Lord had visited His people by giving them bread. 7 Therefore she went out from the place where she was, and her two daughters-in-law with her; and they went on the way to return to the land of Judah.

A. She heard while in Moab that the Lord had visited His people.

1. Does that mean the news spread that the Lord had visited His people, or
2. does that mean news spread that Judah had bread, and

- a) she understood that it was the Lord who had done so?
 - b) The text does not answer that question.
- B. How had the Lord visited His people?
- 1. He gave them bread.
 - 2. Therefore, it does not necessarily mean that He went there, but
 - a) visiting can also mean to supply what someone needs, and
 - b) that is what the Lord did.
- C. Initially, Orpah and Ruth followed Naomi.

IV. Ruth 1.8–13 – Naomi's love for her daughters-in-law

8 And Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go, return each to her mother's house. The Lord deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me. 9 The Lord grant that you may find rest, each in the house of her husband." So she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept. 10 And they said to her, "Surely we will return with you to your people." 11 But Naomi said, "Turn back, my daughters; why will you go with me? Are there still sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands? 12 Turn back, my daughters, go—for I am too old to have a husband. If I should say I have hope, if I should have a husband tonight and should also bear sons, 13 would you wait for them till they were grown? Would you restrain yourselves from having husbands? No, my daughters; for it grieves me very much for your sakes that the hand of the Lord has gone out against me!"

- A. See how Naomi put everything in the context of the Lord.
- 1. She wanted the Lord to deal kindly with them.
 - 2. She wanted the Lord to grant that they would find rest.
 - 3. She believed that the hand of the Lord had gone out against her.
- B. She obviously love Orpah and Ruth very much.
- C. Why did she tell them to return to their homes, their mother's house?
- 1. She did not have any more sons.
 - 2. Even if she married that night and had sons,

- a) she could not imagine them waiting for those sons to grow.
- b) She could not imagine them restraining themselves from marriage.

D. For what was she grieved?

- 1. She was grieved for her daughters-in-law.
- 2. She believed the hand of the Lord had been against her.
 - a) What do you think of that statement?
 - b) Whether the Lord did it directly or not,
 - (1) we do not know, but
 - (2) He did allow it.

V. **Ruth 1.14–15 – Ruth clung to Naomi**

14 Then they lifted up their voices and wept again; and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her. 15 And she said, “Look, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law.”

A. Naomi truly loved her daughters-in-law, and they truly loved her.

- 1. She looked out for their welfare, but
- 2. what do you think of her urging them to return to their gods?
 - a) Was this a way of testing them?
 - b) Did she want to see whether they had converted, because she was bringing Moabites to Israel?

B. Ruth absolutely refused to part from her beloved mother-in-law.

- 1. What kind of woman must Naomi have been?
- 2. Is there anyone in your life that you would not leave for any reason?
 - a) If so, what is he or she like?
 - b) Now, seek to be the same way.

VI. **Ruth 1.16–17 – Everlasting commitment**

16 But Ruth said:

**“Entreat me not to leave you,
Or to turn back from following after you;
For wherever you go, I will go;
And wherever you lodge, I will lodge;
Your people shall be my people,
And your God, my God.**

**17 Where you die, I will die,
And there will I be buried.
The Lord do so to me, and more also,
If anything but death parts you and me.”**

A. Kerri and I included this as our vows.

1. Back in the 1970s, it was popular to write your own vows.
2. However, I question our wisdom now, because
 - a) of the first two lines in verse 17.
 - b) What about when one of us dies, and then remarries?
 - (1) What if that new marriage takes us to another land?
 - (2) Have we violated what we vowed?

B. Ruth committed herself heart, body, and soul to Naomi.

1. This says much about Ruth, but
2. it also says much about Naomi!

VII. Ruth 1.18–19a – They move to Bethlehem

18 When she saw that she was determined to go with her, she stopped speaking to her. 19a Now the two of them went until they came to Bethlehem.

A. Ruth outdid Naomi.

B. What happens when two hearts bond in this way?

VIII. Ruth 1.19b–21 – Naomi’s new name

19b And it happened, when they had come to Bethlehem, that all the city was

excited because of them; and the women said, “Is this Naomi?” 20 But she said to them, “Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. 21 I went out full, and the Lord has brought me home again empty. Why do you call me Naomi, since the Lord has testified against me, and the Almighty has afflicted me?”

- A. Everyone in Bethlehem rejoiced to see a long lost relative.
- B. However, when they said, “Is this Naomi?”
 - 1. she said that she needed to go by another name.
 - 2. What does Naomi mean?
 - 3. What does Mara mean?
- C. What explanation did she give?

IX. Ruth 1.22 – Perfect timing

22 So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabitess her daughter-in-law with her, who returned from the country of Moab. Now they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest.

- A. The Lord works behind the scenes that things might go according to His plan.
 - 1. We may not see it that way,
 - 2. even as Naomi did not.
- B. However, as good as a woman as Naomi was,
 - 1. she was not God, nor
 - 2. was she a prophetess.
 - a) Therefore, she could not know
 - b) that arriving back in Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest
 - (1) meant that Ruth would meet a man, and
 - (2) all the good that would come through that union.