

Ruth Study, first two chapters, 45 verses.

Time: around 1,000 B.C., 3,000 years ago.

Where: Story line starts in Bethlehem, moves to Moab, and then back to Bethlehem

Historical background: The story of Ruth takes place during the time of the Judges, between Joshua's conquest of Canaan and Saul's coronation. The time of the Judges was a time of political and moral chaos. Read from *Revell Bible Dictionary*, 597-598. And Judges 2:10-19.

Opening question: What is friendship? Or, What is a part of friendship that you find especially significant and/or neglected in our society?

Read Ruth 1-2, four volunteers to read ten verses each

1. Why did Elimelech leave Bethlehem? How long did they intend to stay in Moab?

[Mahlon means sickly, Kilion means failing. The names reflected the hard times in Bethlehem. Matthew Henry says: "I see not how his removal into the country of Moab upon this occasion could be justified. The seed of Israel were now fixed, and ought not to remove into the territories of the heathens. What reason had Elimelech to go more than any of his neighbors? If he could not be content with the short allowance that his neighbors took up with, if he could not live in hope that there would come years of plenty again in due time, or could not with patience wait for those years, it was his fault, and he did by it dishonor God and the good land he had given them. . . ." This idea becomes important later when Naomi references the tragedies that befall her.]

[Moab (Ruth's homeland): Moab was the son of an incestuous union between Lot and his daughter so generally the Israelites didn't think much of them, and neither did the Moabites think much of the Israelites. Israelites were not forbidden to marry Moabites, but no Moabites or their sons to the tenth generation were permitted in the Tabernacle. The Moabites worshiped the pagan deities Chemosh and Ammon.]

1. Elimelech's family left the Holy Land because of a famine. What "famines" in our own lives may tempt us to turn away from God?
2. Whom did Naomi lose while in Moab?
3. Why did Naomi decide to go back to Bethlehem? Is there more than one reason, do you think?
4. Compare Naomi's reason or reasons for returning to Bethlehem with the reasons we may, like prodigal children, go back to God after a time away from him.
5. Note v. 7. Think about what's happened from the perspective of Ruth and Orpah. Their husbands have died, and their mother-in-law is about to take a 50-mile trek through rough terrain, known for being a home to thieves, to enter a place that would be entirely foreign to them, yet the text says they went with Naomi. What are some possible reasons they did this?
6. What does Naomi tell them to do and what are the reactions of the two women?

7. When Naomi tells her daughters-in-law of the coming trials if they go with her to Canaan, Orpah returns to paganistic Moab and Ruth becomes more resolute in her decision to stay with Naomi. Compare this to the account of Matt. 8:18-22. What are the similarities? What are some possible reasons for why Naomi and Jesus pointed out coming adversity?
8. What does Ruth say to assure Naomi that Ruth is with her to stay?
9. Upon choosing to go with Naomi, among other things Ruth says, “Your people shall be my people.” Can you see any parallels between what Ruth pledges and what our pledge should be in relation to God’s people when we decide to follow God?
10. What does Naomi say to her acquaintances when she arrives back in Bethlehem? Whom does she say is the cause of her plight? Look at these verses to get an idea of Naomi’s losses: 3, 5, 15, 13b, 19b, 20, 21, 22.
11. Who is Boaz? Verses 2:1, 20. Read about Kinsman Redeemer.¹
12. What do you think of him when you read chapter 2? Why?
13. What do we learn about Ruth in this chapter?
14. One of the reasons Boaz notices Ruth is because she is hard worker. Can you think of a time in your own life when your own hard work has gained you favor in another’s eyes? When slothfulness has made you miserable?
15. What do verses 2:9 and 2:22 imply about the moral state the people in Canaan.
16. What does Boaz do for Ruth?
17. What can we learn about friendship or loyalty from Ruth? Do you think Naomi would have been pleasant to be around? What part does adversity play in their relationship?

¹ It is important to note that the Jews would have heard the story of Ruth repeatedly throughout their lives so that when the idea of “redeem” was brought up in relation to Jesus, many of them would have remembered the story of Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz.