

AN INDUCTIVE STUDY OF RUTH

Ruth Chapter 1 Study Notes

- I. Identify the genre
 - A. Identifying the genre guides how we approach the study. Ruth is narrative history. Narrative history is different from law, poetry, apocalypse, prophecy or epistles. It deals with real history, not a fabricated story. It tells about real people, places and events and how God manifests himself. As God manifests himself through his words, we can see how people respond. Some people respond with faith. Other people rebel against God. We can also see how God deals with people. Those who respond with faith are blessed and used by God. Those who rebel suffer from the consequences. As we focus our study on God, we can find the unchanging truth about him and apply it to our own times.
 - B. As historical narrative, the book of Ruth could be studied from a merely historical point of view. However, we need to approach it as more than just a historical narrative. It is God's history. And to truly understand it, we need to study from the perspective of God's redemptive work.
 - C. Our main pursuit is to learn who God is, meet God very personally, and learn how he guides us in our practical lives.
- II. Divide into paragraphs and give titles to each paragraph.
 - A. The purpose of this division is to see the big picture of the passage which helps us to find the main idea.
 - B. Chapter 1

1. Verses 1-5 tell the background of the story. It explains how Naomi and her two daughters-in-law became widows in Moab.
2. Verses 6-14 is dialogue between Naomi and her daughters-in-law on the road back to Bethlehem.
3. Verses 15-18 describe how Ruth determined to follow Naomi.
4. Verses 19-22 tell how Naomi returned to Bethlehem, along with Ruth.

III. Observation

- A. Observation is the act of regarding attentively or being alert. This action involves more than physical sight; it has to do with keen mental awareness.
- B. When we begin to observe a Bible passage, we also begin to interpret it right away. Usually, observation and interpretation happen almost simultaneously. But we need to pay attention to the facts very carefully before we interpret them. Also, when we find the main idea, we need to focus more on interpretation. This requires meditation, key word study, references to other Bible passages and outside resources.
- C. Observation means to find what the Bible passage actually says. Many people do not say more than they already know about a Bible passage. They do not continue to observe in more depth and detail than they did previously. We need to humble ourselves and concentrate on the facts. It is helpful to employ two tools as we observe the passage.
 1. Observe the five w's and one h: who, what, when, where, why and how.
 2. Observe by using the five fingers method: emphasis, repetition, relationships, comparisons, and contrasts.

D. Chapter 1 (five w's and one h)

1. Who appears?
 - a) Main characters: Naomi, Ruth.
 - b) Supporting characters: Elimelech, Mahlon, Kilion, Orpah, the whole town--especially women.
 - c) Director and Divine Orchestrator: the LORD (6).
2. What is happening? Elimelech's family went to Moab to avoid a famine. Elimelech, Mahlon and Kilion died. Naomi returns to Bethlehem and Ruth accompanies her.
3. When does this take place?
 - a) Historical time
 - (1) "In the days when the Judges ruled..." (1a).
The time of Judges started from the death of Joshua (B.C. 1375?) and lasted through the time of the last judge Samuel (B.C. 1051?), and up until the time of crowning of Saul as the nation's first king. Through the genealogy of David, we can guess that Naomi went to Moab and Ruth married Boaz in the middle of the time of Judges.
 - (2) In the time of the Judges we find a repeated pattern: Israel serves the Lord, Israel falls into sin and idolatry, Israel is enslaved, Israel cries out to the Lord, God raises up a judge, Israel is delivered.
 - (3) The characteristics of those days are described in the book of Judges: "In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as they saw fit" (Jdg 17:6; 21:25; see also 18:1; 19:1).
 - (4) The fact that the story of Ruth took place in those days tells us how God uses anyone

who is faithful regardless of the darkness of the times.

b) Specific time

- (1) "...there was a famine in the land..." (1b). In ancient times, the whole economy depended on agriculture. Famines were a serious threat to the survival of the people. This famine can be explained as a judgmental act of God (Deut 28:38-40).
- (2) Elimelech's family stayed in Moab about ten years (4).
- (3) In the time of famine, the LORD came to the aid of his people and it became a time of abundance (6).
- (4) Naomi and Ruth returned to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest (22). It might have been the end of April as we know it.

4. Where does this take place?

a) Historical place

- (1) Bethlehem (1). "Ephrath," which means "fruitful," (2), is an ancient name of "Bethlehem," which means "house of bread." (See Gen 35:19; 1Sa 17:12; Micah 5:2.)
- (2) Moab (1). The Moabites were descendants of one of Lot's daughters, as the result of an incestuous relationship with her father (Gen 19:30-38). "Moab" means "who is my dad?" When the Israelites came out of Egypt, the king of Moab refused to allow them to pass through his land. Rather, he tried to curse

them through Balaam (Num 22-24). But God turned the curse into a blessing. Then, Moabite women seduced Israelite men and enticed them to indulge in sexual immorality and worship their gods. Because of this many Israelite men were punished by death (Num 25). Moses made a law that no Moabite could enter the assembly of the LORD (Deut 23:3-6). They could not be members of God's covenant or dwell among his people. In the early period of Judges, Eglon king of Moab had power over Israel and ruled them harshly for 18 years (Jud 3:12-14). There was a great hostility between the Israelites and Moabites.

(3) Bethlehem (22). This passage begins and ends in Bethlehem.

b) Specific place

(1) On the road (7). Some important conversations have taken place "on the road," including Jesus asking his disciples who he was.

5. How?

a) On the road from Moab to Bethlehem Naomi has conversations with her daughters-in-law.

6. Through observation using the five W's and one H, we can grasp the big picture of this passage. This is basic observation. Now we need to observe in more detail by using the five fingers method. Through this we can find the main idea and key words.

E. Chapter 1 (five fingers)

1. In using the five fingers' method, the point is not to find a comment for each of the five fingers. Rather, this is simply a tool to help us analyze the Bible passage. For example, in some Bible passages there may not be any repetition. In such a case, we should not manufacture a repetition of our own imagination.
2. Repeated words.
 - a) "return" or "go back" 11 times (6,7,8,10,11,12, 15[2],16,21,22).
 - b) "LORD" or "God" or "the Almighty" 11 times (6,8,9,13,16[2],17,20,21[3])
 - c) "husband" 8 times (3,5,8,9,11,12[2],13)
 - d) "Daughter" or "daughter-in-law" 7 times (6,7,8,11,12,13,22)
 - e) "People" 5 times (6,10,15,16[2])
 - f) Phrases that express God's painful discipline, 4 times (13,20,21[2])
3. Comparison
 - a) May the LORD show you kindness as you have shown kindness to your dead husbands and me (8)
4. Contrasts.
 - a) Three men died and three women became widows (3-5).
 - b) Famine and abundant (1,6). Famine was regarded as God's punishment. Abundance was regarded as God's blessing.
 - c) Orpah did not follow Naomi but Ruth clung to her (14).
 - d) The gods of Moab and the God of Israel (15,16).
 - e) Naomi and Mara (20).
 - f) Full and empty (21).

5. Relationships.

- a) Naomi and Ruth--mother-in-law and daughter-in-law
- b) Jew and Moabite
- c) Cause and effect. When there was a famine Elimelech and Naomi went to Moab and Naomi lost everything. But when she heard that God provided food for his people she decided to return.

6. Emphasis.

- a) Verses 1-5 are the background.
- b) Verses 19-22 describe Naomi and Ruth coming to Bethlehem.
- c) Verses 6-18 is a conversation between Naomi and her two daughters-in-law. The author gives the majority of this passage to revealing the contents of this conversation.
- d) Especially, in verses 15-18, the author emphasizes how Ruth determined to follow Naomi.

IV. Interpretation

A. The meaning of Naomi's decision to return to Bethlehem

1. As we have observed, the key word is "return," which is most repeated. What is the meaning of Naomi's return to Bethlehem? We can understand this based on her words.
2. She said: "...the LORD's hand has turned against me," (13b), "the Almighty has made my life bitter" (20), "the LORD has brought me back empty" (21a), "the LORD has afflicted me; the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me" (21b).
 - a) Naomi's return in relation to the LORD. At first glance, we can guess that Naomi spoke these words out of bitterness toward the LORD. Those

who are bitter pour out their complaints to anyone, anywhere, anytime. It seems that she was pouring out her complaints to her daughters-in-law and the people of Bethlehem. The problem with this interpretation is that if she was bitter toward the LORD, why would she go back to Bethlehem in Judah, to his people? We should acknowledge that she went back to Bethlehem with a godly motive.

- b) Naomi's return in relation to her people. It was not easy for Naomi to return empty-handed. She had lost her husband, two sons, and had no grandchildren. There was no hope. No one wants to go back to their hometown with the sense that their life has been a total failure. It was shameful and disgraceful. She would certainly be an object of gossip and be blamed by townspeople.
- c) What, then, motivated Naomi to return? It was when she heard the good news that the LORD had come to the aid of his people by providing food for them. The famine was God's punishment. The famine ended because of God's mercy. Now it was the time of blessing and abundance. Naomi realized that the LORD is the sovereign Ruler. After disciplining his people, God blesses them. She found hope in God, like the prodigal son in Jesus' parable. She was deeply aware of God's intervention in her life. Her fruitless life and total failure was not an accident. It was the expression of God's discipline. She realized that God afflicts those who oppose him. Her return was her surrender to God. This was her sincere repentance.

d) In what respect did she need to repent?

- (1) First of all, Naomi should not have gone to Moab during the famine. Through the famine God was disciplining his people. It was the time of Judges and idol worship was rampant. They should stay and receive this discipline from the LORD.
- (2) God was not pleased that his people left the promised land to go to a country of idol worship, like Moab.
- (3) It seems that Naomi initially went to Moab following her husband. As the head of the household, Elimelech bore the responsibility for this decision. His death was a sign that God was not pleased with their decision to go to Moab. After his death, Naomi became the head of the household. She should have returned to Bethlehem right away. But she decided to remain in Moab and find daughters in law for her sons.
- (4) After the death of her husband, Naomi still had hope for her two sons, Mahlon and Kilion. They married Moabite women. In those times, parents were very involved in their children's' decision to marry. Naomi must have approved of these marriages. She might even have arranged them, choosing the best candidates for her sons.
- (5) After the sons married they lived in Moab for ten years. But they had no children. This barrenness was another sign from God to

return to Bethlehem. However, they did not. The sons died without leaving any children.

At that point, Naomi had lost everything.

(6) At this point, she knew that it was the LORD who was against her, taking everything away from her. She faced a serious crisis. Now she had to decide whether to blame God and become bitter, or acknowledge God and her own wrongdoing and go back in repentance. When she heard what God had done for his people, she decided to go back. This was her sincere repentance.

(7) In short, Naomi got up from the seat of deep despair and returned to Bethlehem with her sincere repentance toward God.

B. The meaning of Ruth's decision to follow Naomi

1. Verses 6-7 explain that when Naomi decided to return to Bethlehem, her daughters-in-law prepared to go with her. At first, Naomi did not consider what would happen to her daughters-in-law when they went to Bethlehem. But as they walked along the road, and she thought about it, she realized that their lives would be very difficult. They were not used to Israelite culture based on the Law. It was very unlikely that they would be able to marry. So Naomi realized that she should persuade her daughters-in-law not to go back to Bethlehem with her (8-18). Naomi tried to persuade them three times.
2. Naomi's first persuasion (8-9). Naomi tried to send them with God's blessings in two ways. The first blessing: "May the LORD show you kindness as you have shown kindness to your dead husband and to me" (8). The word

“kindness” is from “hesed” in Hebrew. It is a covenant term, wrapping up the attributes of God: love, covenant faithfulness, mercy, grace, kindness, loyalty. In short, it refers to acts of devotion and loving kindness that go beyond the requirements of duty. As they had devoted themselves to serve the deceased and Naomi, so the LORD would be devoted to bless them and be with them. In other words, may God protect them and help them to live by faith in him even though they stay in Moab. This first blessing was a spiritual blessing. The second blessing was to find rest in the home of another husband. These blessings tell us that Naomi loved them genuinely. It was not easy for her to send them back to Moab. It meant Naomi would be alone. In such a hopeless situation, if someone had remained with her, it would be very encouraging. The two daughters-in-law were willing to follow her. There seems to be no reason to let them go. But Naomi had a genuine concern for the wellbeing of her daughters-in-law instead of being primarily concerned about herself.

3. The first response of Orpah and Ruth (10). They wept aloud. They were moved by Naomi’s genuine love. Though it was not easy to go to Israel, they were willing to follow Naomi and her people.
4. Naomi’s second persuasion (11-13). When Naomi knew that they were willing to follow her, it would have been easy to accept them and say, “Sure, let’s go together. Let’s find a way to survive together.” However, Naomi firmly decided to persuade them to stay in Moab. Her second persuasion was even more appealing. She gave a few reasons. First of all, no Israelites would allow their

sons to marry Moabite women (11). Only Naomi would be willing to give her son to them in marriage. But Naomi was too old to have another husband (12a). Even if Naomi had a husband that night and had sons, it would take too long for them to grow up enough to marry (12b-13a). So they could have no real hope of marriage. Though they shared a common grief in being widows, Naomi's situation was more bitter than theirs. It was because the Lord's hand was against Naomi. She did not want them to share her divine discipline (13b).

(Note: verses 11-13 are based on the Old Testament law [Deut 25:5-10]. This will be developed further in chapters 3 and 4 with the introduction of the "guardian-redeemer.")

5. The second response of Orpah and Ruth (14). They were moved by Naomi's genuine love again and wept aloud again. Orpah was persuaded and kissed Naomi goodbye. But Ruth clung to Naomi (half success for Naomi).
6. Naomi's third persuasion (15). Naomi used Orpah as an example. Naomi was really persistent. Why? Naomi knew how difficult it would be for Ruth to survive in Israel. Living in a foreign country is very challenging. The relationship between Israel and Moab was terrible. For a Moabite widow, it could be very hostile. Ruth was still pretty young. She could find another husband and have a happy family in Moab. Naomi was really an amazing mother-in-law. She understood their situation and was concerned for their future lives more than herself. This love must have characterized Naomi's relationship with them and compelled them to follow her.

7. Ruth's decision (16-17).

a) Naomi was persistent, but Ruth was also persistent. Ruth was determined to follow Naomi and would not be persuaded to turn back. When we make a big decision, there is a value judgment involved. Usually, people decide to do what is most beneficial for them. If there is no benefit, we are not willing to pay a price. But in Ruth's case, there was no apparent benefit at all to follow Naomi. Rather, she should invest her whole life and future for not benefit at all. Humanly speaking, it was very foolish--even crazy.

b) Why was Ruth so determined to follow Naomi? Was it because Naomi was great? Was it because Naomi was wealthy? Was it because Naomi was giving her hope to remarry dashing handsome prince? No, not at all! Rather, Naomi lost everything. She was poor, old widow full of sorrow and bitterness. She had nothing to give. However, Naomi had one true God.

c) Ruth had a clear reason. It was not merely sympathy. At the root of her decision was a determination to live with Naomi's people and her God. She was motivated to follow the God of Israel, the true God.

(1) She said, "Your God will be my God," and called him "the LORD," which means "Yahweh." "Yahweh" means "the Alpha and the Omega," "the beginning and the end," the one true God. He is distinguished from all other man-made gods. The primary god of

Moab was Chemosh (Nu 21:29), who demanded that children be sacrificed to him as an offering. For example, when the king of Moab was nearly defeated in battle, he offered his firstborn son, the crown prince, as an offering to his god (2Ki 3:27). Due to this idolatry, Ruth had lived in a terrible environment. At the same time, she had no idea who the God of Israel was until she met Naomi. Perhaps Ruth had a negative view of the God of Israel. However, when Ruth lived together with her mother-in-law, she experienced who the God of Israel was. She could meet the God of Israel and experience his love. She realized that it was faith in this God that made Naomi such a wonderful mother-in-law. Then she could confess that the God of Naomi was her God. She decided to die and be buried with Naomi.

(2) She said, “May the LORD deal with me, be it ever so severely, if even death separates you and me” (17). This is the form of an oath made personally before the LORD. This tells us that she met the LORD as her personal God. She wanted to follow Naomi to have fellowship with God continually. She wanted to know him and experience God’s love and grace in her practical life. Here we see that Ruth discovered the true God who ruled Naomi’s life and she was determined to

follow him, realizing how valuable he was (Mt 13:44).

- d) Naomi's influence on Ruth. In a very bitter moment, when Naomi had hit rock bottom, she trusted God. Ruth saw everything and trusted her mother-in-law and her God. Naomi's life of faith greatly influenced Ruth's life. Ruth was a fruit of Naomi's faith in God during a time of extreme trial.
- e) At the root of Ruth's decision was her genuine love for her mother-in-law. She loved her deeply that she made a commitment to embrace Naomi's whole world. Love is not feeling. Love is commitment. Faith and love go together. Without faith, love cannot be true love. Without love, faith is cold. In fact, faith is expressed itself through love (Gal 5:6b). Ruth's love for Naomi was fueled by her faith in God. Ruth made a commitment to God first and then to Naomi the next.

C. In verses 19-22, we can see how Naomi returned from Moab accompanied by Ruth, who was the fruit of Naomi's life.

V. Application.

A. What do you learn from Naomi?

1. Naomi loved her daughters-in-law genuinely and was mindful of them in a time of crisis, even more than herself.
2. She recognized that her suffering was not random or an accident, but precisely the LORD's hand against her to bring her to repentance.
3. Naomi was courageous in returning to Bethlehem as an act of repentance. It can be compared to the prodigal son returning to his father's house.

4. Naomi's life of faith was an effective means of evangelism of her family members.

B. What do you learn from Ruth?

1. Ruth was not most concerned about her future happiness in a critical moment. She was concerned about her mother-in-law. It was because she believed that her life and family were in God's hand. She trusted God.
2. Ruth was courageous to commit her whole life and future to pursue God.
3. Ruth had a spiritual value system that honored God as the greatest treasure.

C. Most of all, what do you learn about who God is?

1. God is the sovereign Ruler. The times were very dark, the times of Judges when each person did as he saw fit. Our times may seem the same. It is easy to despair over the darkness. But the Sovereign God worked in the lives of one woman who repented and one woman who trusted her life to him and advanced his redemptive work. In our dark times, we should look to God who can work for his redemptive purpose through one person who repents and one person who gives their life to him.
2. God disciplines those he loves and who love him.
3. During the time of God's discipline, he is purifying our faith so that we may grow.
4. God wants us to be blessed and to bear good fruit.