

Introduction:

- Open your Bibles to the Book of Ruth. You will find it right after the book of Judges and before First Samuel.
- I read this Book several times over vacation and my eyes were really opened to the amount of love revealed in the book, the power of healthy relationships and strength of character.
- When I do a Book of the Bible study, I like to start with a background study. This often gives us insight into the truth the Book carries.

I. Background - I have always found that good research on the background of a book can give us good insight to the truth the book carries.A. Purpose: A book's purpose has to do with why it was written.

1. Scholars still have not found a solid purpose for the Book of Ruth. Most books of the Bible have a stated purpose found somewhere in its content. Ruth, not so much.
2. I will skip all the arguments and tell you my certain opinion. The Book of Ruth exists to speak of David and his dynasty. What are his roots? Where did he come from? Ruth actually ends with the genealogy of David. "...*A son has been born to Naomi. They named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David.*" (Ruth 4:17, ESV)
3. I believe the other purpose of the Book of Ruth is to declare the love of God towards all people. "*For some, it intends to teach proper conduct in Israel through the exemplary conduct of the story's characters. Such behavior includes loyalty (Heb. *hesed*; so Humbert, Würthwein), generosity (Weiser), traditional family duties (Fohrer), and openness to foreigners (Kuntz).*" Hubbard, R. L. (1988). [The Book of Ruth](#) (p. 38). Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

B. Setting:

1. "The book of Ruth would provide an answer: foreigners who adopt Yahweh and outdo the Israelites in *hesed* merit acceptance as full-fledged Israelites." Hubbard, R. L. (1988). [The Book of Ruth](#) (p. 45). Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.
2. The time of writing could be during David's time or possibly Solomon's time.

C. Genre: the book is not prophetic. It is not historical. It is not poetic. It really is a short story that introduces David's roots and God's *hesed* (loving kindness, mercy, loyal devotion). It is a short narrative piece.D. Legal situations: There are three legal customs found in the book: inheritance, redemption (Lev. 25:23-34; 47-55), and the remarriage of a childless widow. (Dt 25:5-10)

E. Themes:

1. God's hand of divine providence behind the scene working in the whole world.
 - a) God graciously rescues Elimelech's family from extinction.

- b) The reversal of Naomi's fortunes from emptiness to fullness.
- c) The reversal of Ruth's fate. She gave up everything. Was placed in high risk settings.
- 2. The acceptance of foreigners into Israel.
- 3. The book's surprise ending of the lineage of King David. Out of tragedy a king is born!
- 4. The role of 'hesed' throughout out the Book of Ruth. (Loving kindness, mercy, loyal devotion.)
- F. Theology:
 - 1. God is active in the daily lives of people.
 - 2. No miracles, signs, or wonders are done in the book, though every prayer that is prayed in the book is answered. (1:8-9; 2:12, 19-20; 3:10; 4:11-12, 14).
 - 3. God's work is hidden but continuous. WayMaker song: "though I do not see Him He is still working."

II. Tragedy Strikes Ruth 1:1-5. No one lives free of tragedy.

- A. *"In the days when Judges ruled."* This helps to establish the setting for the story.
 - 1. The days of the judges were painful times. Israel was unfaithful. Her enemies terrorized her. Judges were raised up to rescue Israel. Often she was dealing with famine at the same time. The time of the judges is between Joshua's death and Saul's anointing as King of Israel. (Note the contrast of the pain of judges and the peace and love found in Ruth.). We read about a story taken out of a very dark time, in which we are allowed to see the Hand of God at work – God's work leading to David, leading to Jesus Christ!
 - 2. There was a famine in the land of Judah as well, at the start of our story. This famine forces us to remember Jewish history. (Note the providence of God at work behind the scenes.) The story teller is beginning to connect his story to past stories. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob all moved around because of famine, in search of food.
 - a) Famines often advanced God's plan for His people. Who would have thought one man, Moses, would bring down an Egyptian empire.
 - b) The mention of famine brings to remembrance the Patriarchs as mentioned.
 - c) But they became prisoners in a foreign land not by chains but by hunger.
 - 3. Elimelech takes his wife Naomi and sons and moved to Moab, where food was plentiful.
 - a) They leave Bethlehem (the house of bread) because it is not supplying.
 - b) They are Epharathites, which identified them as people from the area of Bethlehem. Or the clan were a clan of Bethlehem. Caleb was an Epharathite.

- B. The names of our stories' characters. These names are only found in Ruth, no other place in the OT.
 1. Elimelech - "God is King." Very little is said other than he died.
 2. Naomi - "pleasant lovely, pleasant one."
 3. The two sons' names really are not found to have meaning.
 4. Ruth - "Neighbor, friend, friendship"
- C. They make their new home in Moab. After some years their sons grow up and marry Moabite women.
- D. Death strikes
 1. Elimelech dies and leaves Naomi without sons to care for her or to claim their family land.
 2. Both sons die. Leaving two more widows. Orpah and Ruth. They live there 10 more years. Naomi is now too old to marry. She is feeling finished. That seems to be when God starts breaking through. Right when you think you are finished.
 3. Waymaker - *"Even when I don't see it, You're working; Even when I can't feel it, You're working; You never stop, You never stop working; You never stop, You never stop working."* God is moving behind the scene! God's work in the world is hidden, but continuous. When God seems absent, know He is working!

III. Hesed Is Seen

- A. 'Hesed' is the Hebrew word for loving kindness, mercy, covenant loyalty. (Note how this word begins to play itself out in the story from Ruth, in many different ways.) Remember it is a Biblical theme of Ruth. His love endures forever!
 1. "The book of Ruth holds out the practice of *hesed* as the ideal lifestyle for Israel."

Hubbard, R. L. (1988). *The Book of Ruth* (p. 45). Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. Hesed is basically us doing the two commands in a beautiful way.
 2. "The lifestyle of *hesed* requires extraordinary commitment". Which Ruth demonstrates. I am not saying commitment is difficult or hard. You are committed to what you love!
 3. Naomi has heard in the fields of Moab that there is plenty of food in Judah.
 4. She decides to return. She sets out with her two daughters but encourages them to stay and find husbands. She says to them...
- B. *"But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go, return each of you to her mother's house. May the Lord deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me."* (Ruth 1:8, ESV) The word translated 'kindly' is 'hesed.' These girls hesed Elimelech and his sons...and Naomi!
 1. What love, on Naomi's part, that she would encourage her daughter-in-laws to stay in their own land with their own people and find husbands and worship their own gods.

2. What I see very prominently in this passage is that there is no 'spirit of control' found upon Naomi. So often, this is not the case because people in Naomi's situation often get into fear, and fear leads to control. Naomi appears to be free of fear and free of control! "*Perfect love casts out all fear!*" 1 John 4:18. Heseḏ does that!
 3. "The author of Ruth takes the two daughters-in-laws, Orpah and Ruth (1:8-17)
 - a) And, without criticism, he reports Orpah's return to Moab in obedience to Naomi's commands. She represents one who does the ordinary, the expected. There is nothing wrong with her conduct—except that it is not *ḥeseḏ*.
 - b) By contrast, Ruth represents the one who does the extraordinary. She does the unexpected! She clings to her mother-in-law and desires to stay with her.
 - (1) She is willing to give up her people, her land, her culture because she 'heseds" Naomi
 - (2) She is committed to her aging mother-in-law.
 - (3) Then comes the famous line used at so many weddings: "*But Ruth said, "Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die I will die."*" (Ruth 1:16, ESV) Sounds like the call to follow Christ.
- C. The two continue to Bethlehem.
1. The town is stirred up when they show up. 'Stirred' - constantly spoken about.
 2. Naomi expressed her broken heart. "Don't call me pleasant or lovely. I am empty, call me Mara. (Hebrew for bitter)
 3. "*So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabite her daughter-in-law with her, who returned from the country of Moab. And they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest."* (Ruth 1:22, ESV)
 - a) Jews read the Book of Ruth during Pentecost.
 - b) Ruth enters the barley fields at harvest and the wheat fields at Pentecost.