
Day 1

Pray: Ask God to reveal his truth to you as you go through this devotion day by day.

Study: In any biblical narrative, historical context is important. Read Ruth 1.1. The author chose to start his narrative by telling us that it was the time of the judges. Why? This must be important information. What do you know about that period in Israel's history? First, ask yourself *when* was the time of the judges? [Think before you go on!] This time of the judges was after God's miraculous deliverance of the people from slavery in Egypt [the Exodus] and victorious entrance into the promised land. Second, ask yourself how had God prepared Israel for success at this time? [Think before you go on!] God had given the new nation a system of laws and two covenants with himself: the Abrahamic Covenant and the Mosaic Covenant. So the nation was well equipped to succeed: they knew what God had promised, knew that God could deliver, and knew what God expected of them. Third, ask yourself what do you know about the events of the time of the judges? After thinking about it, read Judges 2.10-19 for some insight.

Reflect: When we read Old Testament history, it can be easy to scoff at these foolish people who were given so much by God and so many chances too, but time after time fell into sin and thus failure. Yet are not our lives reflective of this problem too? Think about all the ways God has blessed you and prepared you for successful life with him; then think about all the times and ways you have not lived up to this potential. Pray to apologize to God and thank him for his forgiveness and ongoing blessing. This should be a freeing experience, to let go of guilt and shame, and renew your desire to walk with God day by day.

Want More? Read Ruth 1.1-2.23, and write down the major problems, decisions/actions, and results of the characters.

Day 2

Pray: Ask God to help you understand the significance of his covenants with the people of Israel as a part of this story, and to draw from that understanding [eventually, not necessarily today] applications to your own way of life.

Study: In any narrative, the tension, the responses of the characters to that tension, and the results from those responses are what drive the theme and plot. Read Ruth 1.1-5. What is the first tension introduced into the story? Can you discern the other tension that will be developed from v.5? Read Deuteronomy 28.1-12 [focus on vv.1-2, 11-12]. In this narrative, there are two tensions: lack of fruitfulness in the fields and lack of fruitfulness in the womb, but these are blessings promised by God in his covenant with Israel. So based on this passage in Deuteronomy 28, if these blessings are lacking, what must be the cause? [Hint: the answer revolves around a very small word in the first sentence of v.1!] Read Leviticus 26.14-20. Who caused the famine? Why?

Reflect: We see here that God is willing to discipline his people to bring them back to him. He desires his people to show him devotion, dependence, and submission/obedience. Now, we live in the New Covenant time period, not under the Mosaic Covenant. So the Mosaic Covenant promises and curses are not applicable to us. But we can discern from that old covenant that God is willing to discipline us [see Hebrews 12.5, if you want to see New Testament teaching on this]. Do you think God is pleased with your effort to show him consistent devotion, or should you improve in that area? Do you think God is pleased with your level of reliance and dependence on him, and your acknowledgment of that need, or should you improve in that area? Do you think God is pleased with your obedience and submission, or should you improve in that area? Don't go begging for discipline! Turn fully to God now.

Want more? Read Ruth 3.1-4:22, and write down the major problems, decisions/actions, and results of the characters. Note, in 1.2, the family are called "Ephrathites of Bethlehem in Judah." V.4.11 also says they were from Ephrathah and Bethlehem. Ephrathah was the name of many locales, and is close to the ancient name for Bethlehem, so we believe it must refer here to the area around the village of Bethlehem.

Day 3

Pray: Ask God to help you discern what is right and wrong, in the actions of the characters of this story as well as in life.

Study: Read Deuteronomy 30.1-5. This is an extreme example Moses gave the people [which would prove to occur centuries later!], that even if things got so bad that God broke up the nation and exiled them, God still would bring them back under certain circumstances. What does this passage say is the proper response of the people if God is disciplining

the nation for disobedience [see v.2]? The Hebrew word שׁוּב [Shoov] means to “turn back” or “return,” and this is the meaning of repentance: to turn back to God in devotion, dependence, and submission. So, if God caused the famine at the start of Ruth, what should have been the response of the people? Read Ruth 1.1-2. What did Elimelech lead his family to do? Was this according to the covenant revelation from God or practical human wisdom? Was this a repentant return to God? We will talk more about this tomorrow, but you should get a sense of it now: did Elimelech keep his family in the land from God, repentantly turn to God in dependence and submission, and trust in God’s provision? or did he seek a solution from practical human wisdom?

Reflect: We also need to repent. At first, we need to repent of our self-reliance and our lack of faith. Even after coming to Christ, we have to repent of our ongoing failures to be fully devoted, dependent, and obedient. Should you start making some time each day to prayerfully repent to God? Can you be assured of his forgiveness?

Want More? Write down your first impressions about the characters of Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz. What do you see that is good or bad in each of them? Look at their major decisions and actions; which do you think were good or bad?

Day 4

Pray: Ask God to help you start making choices based on his revelation instead of on what appeals to human wisdom.

Study: If you have access to a map, look where Moab is in relation to Judah. What do you know about Moab? There was a twenty-five mile wide fertile plateau visible from Judah. Read Deuteronomy 23.3-6. This information also is part of God’s covenant revelation to Israel at this time. Did Elimelech follow God’s revelation or human wisdom in choosing to take his family to Moab for food? Does this seem like a repentant attitude? Is Elimelech showing devotion, dependence, and submission to God or choosing to sin and go his own way? If you were God, how would you view Elimelech’s decision to rely on Moab for provision instead of you? Read Ruth 1.3. In the Bible, there is limited space to tell the narrative. The authors, guided by God, must choose carefully what information to include and what not, what to emphasize and what not. Everything included thus matters. Look at the progression from v.1 to v.2 to v.3: God brought a famine because of disobedience; Elimelech led his family to Moab to seek food instead of obeying and trusting God; God killed Elimelech. That is concise story telling technique; can you see the connections between events?

Reflect: Read the insert on “top line / bottom line” choices [also available on the OT History page of www.groben.com]. Reflect on this material.

Want More? The books of Leviticus and Deuteronomy seem dull to many of us. But could we really understand what was happening in Ruth 1.1-5 without looking into these books? When Jesus was tempted in the wilderness, every one of his responses to Satan were quotations of Deuteronomy! What does that suggest about the importance of understanding this material? Even though we are not living under the Mosaic Law today, would understanding the Mosaic Law help us?

Day 5

Pray: Ask God to strengthen your understanding and application of scripture to your life.

Study: The second tension in the story is lack of children. Read Deuteronomy 7.1-4. Read also 1 Kings 11.1-2. What was God’s view of Israelites marrying Moabites? Though Moab is not mentioned in the Deuteronomy 7 passage, what do these verses suggest about God’s attitude toward the Israelites marrying foreigners who worship other gods? 1 Kings 11.1-2 refers to these verses and includes Moab. Read Deuteronomy 7.12-14. If the Israelites are obedient, what is promised to them here? Read Ruth 1.4-5. Did Elimelech’s sons choose to walk with God in obedience and dependence, or did they choose to find their own solution to the lack of children? After the sons married Moabite women, neither woman had a child in the ten years of marriage, and then God killed the husbands. What does that suggest about God’s thoughts on the subject?

Reflect: How similar were Elimelech’s children’s responses to tension compared to his own? In other words, when faced with the choice of dependence on God and obedience to God or finding their own solutions with human wisdom, which did the sons choose? and was that similar to how their father chose? What does that imply for parents today? Often, the biggest obstacle to faith and obedience for children and teenagers is the lack of faith and obedience exhibited by their parents. If you want to bless any children in your life, should you focus on your relationship with God or providing them with fun experiences and material blessings?