



Time to Reflect

- What do you already know about the book of Ruth and the story that it tells?
- How does our understanding of God's global perspective impact how we engage with and support Christian mission and ministry throughout the world?

This year we will be looking at two books from the Old Testament: Ruth and Esther. Until Christmas our attention will be focused on Ruth. There may only be four chapters in Ruth but there is much for us to reflect on as we consider themes of faithfulness, grace and compassion. This is a story about loss, love and legacy. It is heart-warming and insightful, and has practical application for everyday living.

"...Ruth is one of the best short stories ever written. Who doesn't love a good story? 'Once upon a time' and 'They all lived happily ever after' are phrases cherished by many. Ruth possesses all the elements of a well-written story."

(Tony Merida, *Ruth For You*, p7)

Specifics

- It is not entirely possible to ascertain with any great level of certainty the identity of the author of Ruth. There is a clear emphasis on the theme of kingship in Ruth and this has led biblical scholars to conclude that it was written sometime during the rise or reign of King David – approximately 1000BC.
- The Talmud (the central text to Rabbinic Judaism) says that Ruth was written by the prophet Samuel and there has been significant debate about this for centuries.
- The actual time of composition is significant as it helps us understand, more fully, the purpose of Ruth. David Strain writes, "**Ruth is not simply a love story, or a tale of a widow's redemption. It is an apologetic for David's kingship...Here is David's unvarnished family history.**"¹
- As we will see, throughout our studies, the book of Ruth reminds us that God works in individual lives and in personal situations. The plot also involves a story of redemption.
- The book is named after Ruth, a Moabitess, and this is the only Old Testament book named after a non-Israelite. Interestingly, Moab was a longstanding enemy of Israel.
- In the four chapters of this short book we will also see that Ruth speaks less than Boaz and Naomi. Her speeches are shorter than those of the other two main characters.
- As we approach this remarkable short book, perhaps the prevailing question is why should we study Ruth?

1. We need to study Ruth because it is God's Word.

- Paul reminds us that all Scripture is "**...God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness...**" (2nd Timothy 3:16).
- Ruth is part of God's Word and we need it for our own spiritual nourishment.

¹ David Strain, *Ruth & Esther: There Is A Redeemer & Sudden Reversals* (Christian Focus Publications, 2018), pp13-14.

2. We need to study Ruth to see the larger story of God's amazing grace.

- The Bible has 66 books in total but they are component parts of the larger story of God. Tony Merida writes, *"The Bible really is a unified book of redemptive history...We therefore need to study individual stories on their own, while keeping the big picture in mind, in order to discern how the little story contributes to this overarching story."*²
- Ruth reminds us about God's amazing grace, extended to humanity through His faithfulness.

3. We need to study Ruth because it helps us develop a better appreciation of God's providence.

- In Ruth we will encounter real life stories that reflect real life problems and situations. The practical nature of Ruth is hugely important. Merida brilliantly reminds us, *"...most of us live in the book of Ruth, not in the book of Exodus! That is, we do not gather manna from heaven every morning and walk through parted seas. We live by faith in God's 'ordinary providence.'"*³
- God is always working things out according to His will and we are called to trust Him.

4. We need to study Ruth to learn more about God's global mercy.

- It is noteworthy that Ruth was a Moabite (1:4) and as such we must recognise how God brought a non-Israelite *"....right into the heart of his people and gives her a place of honour."*⁴
- God's heart is for all people and all nations. His mercy and grace extend to everyone and He does indeed love the whole world (John 3:16).

5. We need to study Ruth as we will discover genuine models of faithfulness.

- There are many characters in the Old Testament who provide us with examples of faithfulness and holiness. This is particularly true of the book of Ruth.
- Ruth teaches us much about loyalty, sincerity, graciousness, courage and devotion. Boaz is a wonderful example of what it means to be just and compassionate. Naomi's story offers us hope as we journey with her from emptiness to fullness.

(v1-5)

- The opening verses of Ruth provide the background to the story that develops in the remainder of the book. We are introduced to Elimelek and his wife, Naomi (v2). We are told that they had two sons: Mahlon and Kilion (v2).
- The location of this first scene in the book of Ruth is named as being Moab (v1). We quickly discover that Elimelek died (v3) and Naomi was left with her two sons – who married Moabite women (Orpah and Ruth).
- The passage moves forward ten years (v4) and we discover that both Mahlon and Kilion also died. The last words of this short introduction are heartbreaking. *"...Naomi was left without her two sons and her husband"* (v5).
- She was a widow in a foreign land, without a means of income and without protection. Naomi is vulnerable as we reach the end of (v5). Her situation appears to be bleak. Yet, amid the darkness and despair, God is at work and His light will shine brightly.
- While she may not have understood it at this stage, there was still hope for Naomi. As we will see, she would journey from tragedy to glory, emptiness to fullness.

² Tony Merida, *Ruth For You* (The Good Book Company, 2020), p9.

³ Ibid, p9.

⁴ Ibid, p9.