

Ruth: *Loyalty or Faithfulness?* (Hebrew - *chesed*)

Date	Weekly Theme	
January 8, 2015	Ruth 1:1-5	<i>Intro to Ruth and the crisis</i>
February 5	Ruth 1:6-22	<i>Loyalty</i>
March 5	Ruth 2	<i>God's Providential Care</i>
April 2	Ruth 3	<i>The Seduction of Boaz</i>
May 7	Ruth 4:1-12	<i>The Gate (Levirate Marriage) Redemption</i>
June 4	Ruth 4:13-22	<i>Lineage of David</i>

Initial Questions

What do you know about the book of Ruth?

If you read the book, was it easy to read?

What, if anything, caught your attention?

• Literary Genre and Style

- Narrative – one of the most beautiful pieces of literature in the Bible
- Novella – a short story where the situations and the characters occupy a more important place than the facts.
- Similar to our fables – Verse 1, “In the day when the judges ruled in Israel” is comparable to our “Once upon a time.” No villain.
- Parable – forerunner of the parables of Jesus
- Oral tradition – passed on perhaps by female storytellers
- Similar to other stories in the books of the Hebrew Bible
 - Jonah
 - Nathan's story to David in 2 Sam 12:1-7
 - Legal proceedings in Deuteronomy 25
 - Building up of the house in 2 Samuel
 - Tamar and Judah in Genesis 38

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• Authorship

- Unknown
- Jewish tradition – Attributed to Samuel, but Samuel died before David became king. The kingship of David seems to be well known in Ruth.
- Prophet Nathan is one tentative suggestion – Within the patriarchal society, the story would have probably been recorded by a male. In that Ruth may have been influenced from a female perspective and passed on by female storytellers
- Author adopts the posture of a storyteller
- From the New Bible Commentary – “The author of Ruth was also aware of God’s hand upon the personal circumstances of families and individuals, encouraging them to look back over events and to trace the mysterious outworking of God’s overflowing goodness in their lives.”

• Dating

- Not an easy task
- Most commonly accepted as on the cusp of the post-exilic period based on historical events mentioned. (5th century BCE)
 - Reign of David
 - Levirate marriage
 - Redemption rites
 - Acceptance of Israelite-foreigner(Moabite) marriage
 - Language – Aramaic influence that would not have been evident until the post-exilic period.

• Characters

- All the names except Boaz are without parallel in scripture and thus may be fictional.
 - Boaz (1 Kings 7:21, 1 Chronicles 2:11-12, 2 Chronicles 3:17, Matt. 1-5)
 - Ruth (Matt 1:5)
 - Representative of the group in Deut 23:3, “No Ammonite or Moabite or any of his descendants may enter the assembly of the Lord, even down to the tenth generation.”
 - Ruth is a part of the lineage of Jesus through whom God brings redemption. The genealogy may be fictitious simply to make the point of the story.
 - Compared to the Good Samaritan in Luke as an admirable character from an ethnic group that was despised and rejected by those who considered themselves to be “people of God”
 - David
 - Authenticates the narrative
 - Sets the timeline of the story
 - Other names were typical names of the time period and may have been chosen for their meaning
 - Elimelech – “My God is King”
 - Mahlon – “Sickness”
 - Chilion – “Spent”
 - Orpah – “Back of the Neck”
 - Naomi – “Pleasant”
 - Mara – “Bitter”
 - Ruth – derivative of the word meaning “Friend” or “Companion”
 - Boaz – derived from two words meaning “In Him is Strength”
- The emphasis of the story is definitely set on the heroine

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- **Setting**
 - Difficult to determine given questions of authorship and dating
 - As an oral tradition, the actual recording probably was much later than the story itself.
 - Countryside – lining up with the storytelling aspects. Story tellers would go about the countryside telling people what life in the city was like.
- **Canon**
 - In the Hebrew Bible, the book of Ruth is found in the third section of the canon, traditionally designated as 'The Writings'.
 - Order of these scrolls varied
 - Historical order – If associated with King David, Ruth would have been first
 - Festival order – Ruth is read during the feast of weeks (our Pentecost) because of its association with the harvest season.
 - Christian Bible
 - Placed after Judges because of the first line.
 - Bridge between Judges (a period when 'there was no king in Israel') and Samuel (the beginning of a united monarchy)

GROUP DISCUSSION

Read the text aloud – **Ruth 1:1-5** (Differing versions if possible)

Address the following questions:

What caught your attention in these first five verses?

- **Ruth 1:1-5 –**
 - **The crisis**
 - Famine in the land –
 - Elimelech and Naomi decide to go to Moab to provide a seemingly better life for the family.
 - Elimelech may have been seen as disloyal to his land and his God.
 - Foreigners or strangers in a new land
 - Sons marry Moabite women
 - Israelites going to Moab not the other way around
 - Elimelech's death
 - Mahlon and Kilion's death
 - Naomi, Orpah, and Ruth are widows and childless
 - Status of widows during these times – no worth or value, dependant on others (family)
 - In a male dominated world the importance of extended family was significant.

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Questions for Reflection and Digestion

What was the economic climate when you were growing up?

What was the economic climate raising your children?

What is the economic climate now?

Have you experienced the loss of a loved one?

Are there times in your life when you felt alone or abandoned?

For further contemplation (next month):

For Reflection this Month

Read Ruth 1:6-22

How did you encounter loyalty or faithfulness in the reading?

Is there a difference between loyalty and faithfulness?

How do you encounter this in your life?