



Anchor Group Study Guide

This *hope* we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the *Presence* behind the veil, where the forerunner has entered for us, *even* Jesus...
(Hebrews 6:19-20)

Naomi and Ruth

Reading: Ruth Chapter 1

Summary/Context: The book of Ruth is set in the dark days of the Judges but before the days of Samuel. It is a beautiful light in a time that would otherwise be remembered for "In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (Judges 21:25). The result was apostasy resulting in tribal and gender violence. Yet in that time, God was doing a wonderful work in His people which resulted in this concise literary masterpiece (which, not insignificantly has a Gentile immigrant within Israel as a main protagonist).

There are several interwoven themes running through the book of Ruth. It would not only be difficult, but possibly a disservice, to limit our journey through this book to just one theme, so please consider these three interwoven themes in our four studies through this wonderful book.

1. God's perfect, generous and redeeming love is for all peoples regardless of ethnicity, gender or status.
2. God's character is expressed in humanity's loyalty, hospitality and community with each other.
3. God honors simple obedience in everyday life to accomplish His greater will.

Subject: Naomi and Ruth

Object: See God at work in your life.

I. Verses 1-5, The Departure

Note: Either from war, weather or judgement, famine caused Elimelech to take his family from Bethlehem ("house of bread") in the bountiful Promised Land of God's provision to Moab to live among people who were banished from the congregation of the Lord (Deuteronomy 23:3-6). In three verses we read the tragedy of Naomi's husband dying, her married sons dying, and then her being left in an extremely dark and patriarchal society that would not be spiritually, physically, or emotionally welcoming to a widow.

1. Explain why, or why not, Elimelech made a poor choice in leaving Bethlehem and settling in Moab.
2. What is a godly response to adult children marrying outside the faith?
3. How do you see God at work in the life of Naomi in the first five verses?

II. Verse 6-18, The Decision

Note: God's provision in harvest is a recurring sub-theme within the book of Ruth, so it was not an accident that Naomi heard the Lord was providing food back in Israel and decided to return. She emotionally released her daughters-in-law because there would be little hope for them as single foreigners in Israel, pronouncing blessings on them with hope for the Lord to grant them rest with new husbands and homes. She explained her life is too bitter to share, and it can only be imagined the sadness with which Orpah turned and left for her own people and gods. Similarly, it can only be imagined the deep emotion as Ruth clung to Naomi even as she was told, "Follow your sister-in-law." Instead, Ruth showed a great loyalty in abandoning the familiar, but great faith to embrace her God (Verse 16).

1. Where do you see God's grace at work in the life of Naomi?
2. What would be some of the challenges for Ruth to leave Moab and return with Naomi to Bethlehem?
3. It is estimated it would take 7 to 10 days for Ruth and Naomi to walk from Moab to Bethlehem. If you had been in Naomi's walking shoes and had that time to disciple Ruth, what are the main points you would desire her to learn in preparation to becoming a follower of God?

III. Verses 19-21, The Return

Note: The news of Naomi's return with a Moabite woman apparently spread through the village of Bethlehem rapidly. Yet, Naomi was not the woman who left more than 10 years earlier. Instead of her name (which meant "pleasant"), she had lost all she valued and desired to be called Mara (meaning "bitter"). She even blamed the Almighty for her feelings because He opposed and afflicted her. Yet, the Chapter ends on an upbeat note and hint of good things to come, "They arrived in Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest."

1. How is Naomi's return to Bethlehem different than her departure?
2. Twice Naomi called the Lord, "Almighty," by using the Hebrew word, *El Shaddai*, meaning the all powerful God. How do you rectify her using that phrase and yet feeling He had emptied her, testified against her, and afflicted her?
3. Did Naomi allow her feelings of bitterness to get in the way (or possibly distort) her view of God? Does this ever happen to you?

Deeper questions and resources:

1. The Bible is full of references associating people to their father's house, but in verse 8, Naomi tells her daughter-in-laws, "Each of you go back to your mother's home." What do you make of this almost singularly-unique phrase?
2. Use [Blue Letter Bible](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/Dictionary/viewTopic.cfm?topic=HT0000734) (<https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/Dictionary/viewTopic.cfm?topic=HT0000734>) or [other resources](https://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionaries/hitchcocks-bible-names/elimelech.html) (<https://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionaries/hitchcocks-bible-names/elimelech.html>) to look up the meanings of the names of main characters in the book of Ruth and determine if those meanings are important to understanding the book.

3. Pastor David Guzik's commentary on Ruth Chapter 1 (<https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/ruth-1/>).
4. The Bible Project's overview of Ruth (<https://bibleproject.com/explore/ruth/>), including an excellent video summation.