

LESSON 1: The Book of Ruth Introduction and Chapter 1

In the *Hebrew Bible*, the Book of Ruth is a part of the *Ketuvim*, or *the Writings*, along with Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Daniel, 1 and 2 Chronicles and other texts considered *wisdom* literature. In our Christian Bibles, this book is placed chronologically; after Judges. This text describes a time before kings ruled Israel. Ruth was a Moabite woman who became a believer in the LORD and ultimately became the great-grandmother of King David.

Here are a few **themes** to watch out for in this short book. **Theme #1** is *Chesed* (or *Hesed*), a word used in the Old Testament to describe the LORD 247 times. *Chesed* is God's **merciful fidelity** in keeping Covenant promises, despite the fickleness of humanity. Watch for this as an attribute of the LORD as you read. (Note how He can turn tragedy into a blessing.) **Theme #2** *Gentiles* are pictured as sympathetic figures. In this book intermarriage is not condemned, but can instead bring *Gentiles* into loving relationship with the LORD. **Theme #3** the importance of loving bonds and loyalty between family or communities.

1. **Read the introduction to Ruth in your Bible. Share any interesting comments you find there with your group.**
2. **Read Ruth 1:1-5 and footnotes.**
 - a. **Share any footnotes for these verses with your group.**
 - b. **Why did Naomi and her family leave Bethlehem?**
 - c. **Discuss the tragic events that Naomi faces in these verses. How do these events affect the life and status of Naomi in this ancient culture?**
 - d. **How are Ruth and Naomi related?**
 - e. **Reflection: What would you do if you found yourself in a similar predicament?**
3. **Read Ruth 1:6-14 and footnotes. Share any interesting footnotes with your group.**
 - a. **Read verse 1:6 in your bible and compare with other bible translations from people in your group. What does this verse mean?**
 - b. **What does 1:6 say about the relationship of the LORD to His people?**
 - c. **Why does Naomi encourage Ruth and Orpha to leave her and return to their mothers' homes instead?**

- d. Read Deuteronomy 25:5-6 below. How does the Law of Moses suggest a family treat the widow of a man who dies before having a son to care for this woman? Does Ruth think this is practical in her case?**

Deuteronomy 25:5-6 If brothers are living together and one of them dies without a son, his widow must not marry outside the family. Her husband's brother shall take her and marry her and fulfill the duty of a brother-in-law to her. ⁶The first son she bears shall carry on the name of the dead brother so that his name will not be blotted out from Israel.

- 4. Read Ruth 1:15-18 and footnotes. Share any interesting footnotes with your group.**

- a. What does Ruth decide to do?**
- b. What do Ruth's words and actions say about her character and her relationship with Naomi?**
- c. Ruth makes a solemn vow to Naomi in 1:16-17. What four promises does she make in these verses?**
- d. Ruth ends her vow with a curse that the LORD should bring to her if she does not live up to her promises in the above verses. What is the curse?**

- 5. Read Ruth 1:19-22 and footnotes.**

- a. How does Naomi's family greet her?**
- b. Why is Naomi bitter according to Ruth 1:19-22?**
- c. Read Deuteronomy 28:15-20 here: if you do not obey the Lord your God and do not carefully follow all his commands and decrees I am giving you today, all these curses will come on you and overtake you: ¹⁶You will be cursed in the city and cursed in the country. ¹⁷Your basket and your kneading trough will be cursed. ¹⁸The fruit of your womb will be cursed, and the crops of your land, and the calves of your herds and the lambs of your flocks. ¹⁹You will be cursed when you come in and cursed when you go out. ²⁰The Lord will send on you curses, confusion and rebuke in everything you put your hand to, until you are destroyed and come to sudden ruin because of the evil you have done in forsaking him.**
- d. In light of the verses from Deuteronomy above, what would Naomi and her people believe about the cause of Naomi's situation?**
- e. What is the real reason Ruth says she is bitter?
(Could she be a bit like Job?)**