

Many have noted that a silver thread of God's grace runs through even the worst periods of ruin. The book of Ruth shows just one small thread that shines brightly among the desolation and unfaithfulness to the Lord we have seen in Judges.

This story has only three main characters – Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz – but manages to portray loyalty, faith, kindness, and redemption. We feel close to these people. What a contrast to the last three chapters of the Judges where none of the actors are named, as if Spirit himself wants to keep His distance from them.

The setting is Bethlehem, also known as Ephrathah, "little among the thousands of Judah" (Micah 5:2). It is only a farming village but how large it figures in Scripture. Bethlehem is located about twenty miles south of Jerusalem. Its name means House of Bread, possibly because of its agricultural fruitfulness. We have seen little of that character in Judges; mostly recently Bethlehem was the home of the Levite's unfaithful concubine. But the union of Ruth and Boaz seems to redeem and bless the little town. In two generations it will give birth to King David. And 1200 years later He who is the Bread of Life will be born in Bethlehem.

Symbolically, we can read Ruth as the story of the restoration of Israel in the millennium, or a picture of the individual Christian's redemption through faith. But it's

a beautiful little story regardless of any deeper meaning. Enjoy.

Notes

Meanings of names

Bethlehem: House of bread

Elimelech: God is king

Mahlon: Sick

Chilion: Pining

Naomi: Pleasant

Mara: Bitter

Orpah: Neck or fawn

Ruth: Friend (perhaps, depending on the commentator)

1:1 Moab was the country east of the Dead Sea, named after Lot's sinfully conceived child (Gen. 19:37). The Moabites were cousins to Abraham's children but generally hostile to them.

1:2 An Ephrathite would be someone from Bethlehem.

1:6 Depending on the starting point in Moab, this trip would take at least a few days. The women would either go around the Dead Sea at its southern end, or at the north crossing the Jordan.

1:17 One's place of burial was quite important in Biblical cultures. Recall Joseph requiring an oath from his children that he would not be left buried in Egypt.

1:21 Naomi uses two names for God: *Jehovah*, or the Lord, and *Shaddai*, the Almighty.

1:22 The harvest season began with the faster growing barley and ended with wheat. It was a festive, sociable season.

Questions:

1. We are not told that the Lord brings the famine upon the land but He does end it in verse 6. What reason could He have to cause a famine?
2. Do you think Elimelech and Naomi follow the right course when they emigrate to Moab? Is there an analogy for us?

3. How is Naomi's widowhood like the later state of Israel?
4. Both Ruth and Orpah seem attached to Naomi. What is different in their relationship?
5. Why does Naomi urge her daughters in law to stay behind? What bad things might happen to them if they go with her?
6. Read Ruth's lovely speech of loyalty to Naomi in verses 16-17. Are there parallels to a Christian's conversion?
7. In verse 21, what does Naomi mean that she returned empty? How and why might the Lord empty our lives?