

## A STUDY OF JUDGES & RUTH

### OH LITTLE TOWN

In Judges 17, the first epilogue, we read of a Levite from Bethlehem in Judah—and we know how that story turned out. In Judges 19, the Levite's concubine was from Bethlehem and it is from there they traveled to the ill-fated town of Gibeah—and we know how that story turned out. The book of *Ruth* begins, "In the days when the judges ruled there was a famine in the land, and a man of Bethlehem in Judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons."

The time of the judges descended to chaos. Famine usually equated to God's judgment. We read "Bethlehem" and the thread connecting the previous two stories prepares us that what we're about to read will be as tragic as it is brutal. "Yet in thy dark streets shineth, the everlasting light. The hopes and fears of all the years [will be] met with thee tonight."

Unlike the previous two stories, the book of *Ruth* provides hope. The events contained within are the reason we sing in of a "little town." Because it was to this town that Mary and Joseph returned, their ancestral home, and had a baby in a manger—a baby more priestly than the Levite and who's suffering would be greater than the concubine.

RUTH 1:16–19, 22–2:3

<sup>16</sup> But Ruth said, "Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God. <sup>17</sup> Where you die I will die, and there will I be buried. May the LORD do so to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you." <sup>18</sup> And when Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more.

<sup>19</sup> So the two of them went on until they came to Bethlehem. And when they came to Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them. And the women said, "Is this Naomi?"

<sup>22</sup> So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabite her daughter-in-law with her, who returned from the country of Moab. And they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest.

<sup>1</sup> Now Naomi had a relative of her husband's, a worthy man of the clan of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz. <sup>2</sup> And Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, "Let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain after him in whose sight I shall find favor." And she said to her, "Go, my daughter." <sup>3</sup> So she set out and went and gleaned in the field after the reapers, and she happened to come to the part of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the clan of Elimelech.

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Several places in Scripture, God said he will always preserve a "remnant." No matter how bad things get, there will always be people loyal to him. *Ruth* illustrates this point at such a low-period in Israel's history. Following *Judges* epilogues things keep looking like tragedy may appear for Ruth at any moment. However, although God isn't mentioned by the narrator, his mighty hand is at work in the story in many of the "just so happened," moments. Scan the QR code to see what I mean.



### DISCUSSION

Considering all that we read in *Judges*, what might you expect in a story about two widows in Israel?

ICEBREAKER

1. What specific commitments did Ruth make to Naomi? (16-17)

OBSERVATION

2. When did Naomi and Ruth arrive in Bethlehem? (22b)

3. What did Ruth ask to do to provide for Naomi and herself and where did she end up?

4. How would you characterize Ruth based on her treatment of Naomi?

INTERPRETATION

5. How have you seen God's loyal love in another person? What might it look like for you to pass that on?

APPLICATION

"You can get bitter or you can get better." Naomi wanted to be called "Mara." Maybe you understand that feeling. However, you don't have to stay there. Talk to your Coach today!

## A STUDY OF JUDGES & RUTH

### STUDY NOTES GREATNESS

For 45 minutes a violinist played in a New York subway. Many people passed, a few stopped to listen, and a handful tipped the musician who made \$30 for his time. The musician's name was Joshua Bell, one of the greatest musicians in the world. Bell has won Grammy's and countless other awards. He has played with virtually every major orchestra in the world as well as having played for sitting presidents and world leaders.

In that Subway, he played one of the hardest pieces ever composed on a violin worth 3.5 million dollars. Two days before, Bell had sold out the Boston theater with seats averaging \$100. Bell is a generational talent at his craft. Greatness stood before every passerby pouring his soul into his music and they didn't know it.

In this Week's study, we meet a Moabite woman named Ruth. Like Bell in the Subway, Ruth was a diamond in the rough. I'm sure people described her as "average" in form and appearance. Yet, she would soon be called "worthy," a title found only in *Proverbs* to describe excellence, character, and honor.

### GODLY LEADERS SHOW LOYAL LOVE

In the introduction, we discussed Ruth 1:1. Although we didn't mention the man, Elimelech, by name, but the story began as he journeyed to Moab with his wife and two sons. Both sons married, but after about 10 years in Moab, Elimelech and his sons died. The men left behind three wives: Naomi, the wife of Elimelech, as well as Ruth and Orpah, the wives of Naomi's sons.

Naomi was a foreigner in Moab and now a widow. With no sons, she was vulnerable. Hearing that the famine in Israel was over, she decided to return to her people. She set out with her two daughters-in-law in tow. They were young and had the potential to remarry. Naomi unselfishly told them to return to their parents and seek a new husband, praying that the Lord would show them the kindness they had shown her. They refused to go, but Naomi insisted. With a kiss, Orpah left. Ruth stayed.

***Ruth said, "Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there will I be buried. May the LORD do so to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you." And when Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more.***

Ruth's words to Naomi stand as one of the greatest pledges in all of Scripture. She promises loyal love, to stay by Naomi's side no matter what. ***So the two of them went on until they came to Bethlehem. And when they came to Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them. And the women said, "Is this Naomi?"***

Naomi return burdened and bitter. She even asked for a name change, Mara, because she perceived, *"the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me"* (20). Yet, he had not.

They went ***to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest.*** Although widows had little option to provide for themselves, they could go glean in the fields. "Gleaning" was the practice of picking left-over grain missed by harvesters. God's Law makes provision for foreigners and widows to glean in this way. ***Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, "Let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain after him in whose sight I shall find favor." And she said to her, "Go, my daughter."*** Fortunately for her, she just so ***happened to come to the part of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the clan of Elimelech.***

### LOYAL LOVE MAKES ENDURING COMMITMENTS

For all intents and purposes, Naomi and Ruth's lives ended with their husbands. They were hopeless and helpless. The only option for most women in their circumstances was prostitution. God didn't want that for his people, so he made provision for widows in his Law. Unfortunately, this was the time of the judges, and God's Law wasn't highly regarded.

At great risk to herself, Ruth went into the fields to provide for her and her mother-in-law. She didn't have to do any of these things. She didn't have to make a promise to Naomi. Nobody would have blamed her for breaking her promise to Naomi. But, Ruth was a promise maker and a promise keeper. She was also a worker, and did what was necessary to fulfill her obligation.

In this time, Ruth displayed a character that very few people did—she reflected God's loyal love. Naomi blamed God for not providing right after Naomi received one of the greatest promises ever recorded. God had provided *through* Ruth.

We don't know why God took those men. We never know why people die. It's unfair and proof that sin still reigns on Earth. However, that doesn't mean that God is not still a promise maker and promise keeper. Naomi had hope because of God's loyal love and we do too.