

P258

Intro: A good story but so much more

Have you ever stayed up too late at night, because you can't bear to put down the book you are reading? "I just have to find out how it ends."

Or have you ever started watching the late movie on TV, and then found yourself unable to turn it off? "I'll just watch to the next ad break." *And the next thing you know it's 1am & you are going to be shattered in the morning*

Good books and movies draw us in and keep us reading or watching because the stories are interesting and we end up caring about the characters. But books and movies can also draw us in because sometimes there is a lot going on – a lot of levels in the story, things happening behind the scenes or beyond the everyday that are fascinating.

The book of Ruth is like this. It's a good story which draws you in, but there are also a lot of levels in it.

Here are just some of them.

1. The story – good story about everyday people
2. The Non-Israelite - *Foreigner* A great example of God saving someone who is not part of the Jewish nation.
3. The Provision – God is working behind the scenes to save these people
4. The Saviour – the way God saves this family shows the way he will save his people once and for all through Jesus – the Kinsman-redeemer
5. The Big Salvation Plan – God saving this family is actually part of him saving all of his people through Jesus.

So let's get stuck into Ruth Ch 1.

Context

V1 - The opening words refer to the historical period described in the book of Judges (roughly 1250–1050 BC). God's people were in the Promised Land, but hadn't conquered it yet. Before there were kings.

Tragedy Strikes

V1 – Famine in the Land leads a family to leave Israel and go and live in Moab (presumably there was food there). Moab – enemies of Israel – part of Promised Land that the Israelites hadn't taken over yet. History of fights between the two nations.

V3-5 - Tragedy strikes the family. First Elimelech dies, and then Mahlon and Kilion also die. Naomi is left in dire straits with no means for support and no hope for the future. All she has left is her daughters-in-law.

Heading Home

V6-7 But hope springs up in a word from Israel – The Lord has come to the aid of his people and provided food for them. When Naomi hears this, she and her daughters-in-law head back to Bethlehem (heading home).

V8-9a – Naomi seems to have a change of heart. She still wants to go back to Bethlehem, but thinks it's better for Orpah and Ruth to go back to their parents. She prays for them – Lord show them kindness – rest in the home of another husband. Even in her grief, she still is seeking the good of Ruth and Orpah.

V9b-13 – They don't want to go, but she tries to persuade them by saying that she can't provide more sons for them to marry. She also says that God has turned his hand against her, implying it might not be good to be with her at the moment.

Conversion

V14-18 – Orpah goes back to her family but Ruth clings (cleaves) to Naomi. Naomi tries to get Ruth to follow Orpah's example, but Ruth refuses. This is one of the most important parts of the chapter. Here we see Ruth's kindness to Naomi but there is more to it than that. Look at v15. Naomi points to Orpah and says that she is going back to her people and her gods. But Ruth will have none of it. (Read v16-17). She wants Naomi's God to be her God. She has joined the covenant people. Whatever happens, Ruth was going to be with Naomi, her people, and her God. This is one of the few instances recorded for us in the OT where a Non-Israelite is converted and joins God's people. God has worked through the lives of Elimelech and his family to save Ruth.

A Light to the Nations

This is what was supposed to happen in the OT – God's people were to be a light to the other nations, so that they would be attracted to God and become his children.

Gen 12:1 The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. **2** "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. **3** I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

God was going to bless the world (all people on earth) through his chosen people.

How was he going to do that?

Ex 19: 3Then Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain and said, "This is what you are to say to the house of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel: **4** 'You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. **5** Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all

nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, 6 you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.'

Priests – represent God to the nation

Holy nation - They were supposed to be different to the nations around them:

- More compassionate towards the outcast and the downtrodden
- Fairer in their justice system
- More devoted to their god
- Etc.

And this difference was supposed to attract the nations around them to Israel, where they could find out about God and become part of the covenant family.

Eg. Moths to a flame

This is what's happened to Ruth.

Home but now what?

V19-22 – Ruth and Naomi return to Bethlehem where everyone is amazed to see Naomi. She doesn't want to be called Naomi anymore but Mara – change from pleasant to bitter, because she says the Lord has made her life very bitter. She says that she went away full, but the Lord has brought her back empty.

This is the main problem the rest of the book addresses. What (if anything) will God do about Naomi's predicament? ~~And is Naomi right to blame God? (v21)~~

But it's not just Naomi's predicament. It's Ruth's too. Ruth has lost her husband – she is now in a foreign land with people who may very well view her as an enemy. It's not just what is God going to do for Naomi, but what is God going to do for Ruth and Naomi now that Ruth is part of God's people

The rest of the book will provide the answers. We get a hint here that God might provide food for them – they arrive just as the barley harvest is beginning.

But the main point of this chapter is that through Naomi's family, God has brought a foreigner into his chosen people. Ruth has become a child of God. Listen to how she is described in ch2:

May you be richly rewarded by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge. 2:12b

Summing it Up: God uses an Israelite family to save a foreigner.

Biblical theology:

- Got to work out how passage applies to Jesus before we work out how it applies to us

As we saw before, Israel was to be a light to the nations. The other nations were supposed to see Israel, realize that they had a great God, and be attracted to Him and become part of God's chosen people. Problem was, Israel didn't do a very good job of this because of their sinfulness. Examples of foreigners joining God's people are few and far between in the OT. Jesus comes as the perfect Israelite and is a true light to the Gentiles.

This points us forward to Jesus.

Isaiah picks up the idea of the coming saviour being a light to the Gentiles in the Servant songs.

And it is picked up in Luke's gospel when Simeon sees the baby Jesus:

Luke 2: 25 Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. **26** It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ. **27** Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, **28** Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying: **29** "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. **30** For my eyes have seen your salvation, **31** which you have prepared in the sight of all people, **32** a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel."

Jesus calls himself the light of the world

John 8: 12 "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

Jesus is the perfect Israelite and is a true light to the Gentiles

Application: Who are you in the story?

Careful - not moralise OT but can see how people respond to God & see if it is a good or bad example for us.

If you are Elimelech and his family, (God's chosen people) then we are to attract people to God by showing them him. the true light

In Pisidian Antioch

Acts 13:44-47 **44** On the next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. **45** When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and talked abusively against what Paul was saying. **46** Then Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly: "We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles. **47** For this is what the Lord has commanded us: " 'I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.' "(Is 49:6)

but to tell them about the true light - Jesus

We go to them, not necessarily attract them to us, and the thing that attracts them is the true light - Jesus.

Not ~~draw~~ attract them to us, but go out to them & show them Jesus

If you are Naomi, one of God's people going through a very hard time, then we have to think about how Naomi responded and think about if we should do the same.

Good points:

- Returns home to Jerusalem when she hears that God has provided food – return = repent
- Shows kindness to Orpah and Ruth and asks for God's blessing on them
- Recognises that God is in charge of the good and the bad – attributes what is happening to God and not to fate or luck.
- Perhaps sees what is happening as a judgment from God because of her family's sinfulness – leaving Promised Land, intermarriage etc. The phrase "the Lord has afflicted me" v21, can be translated as "the Lord has testified against me" as if in a court of law.

Bad points:

- Blames God for her predicament
- Gets very bitter

The rest of the book will show if Naomi's view of God is correct or not, but at least she has not completely rejected God in her pain. She is still a believer, but a very hurting one. And I think too we are to empathise with her in her emotional devastation, *but not necessarily follow her example*

If you are Ruth, (a foreigner, not yet part of God's chosen people) then we need to act the way she did. Come to God, take shelter under his wings (salvation), and then cling to God's people, loving them and living a changed life. She didn't do what seemed best for her or what looked most sensible from a worldly perspective, but potentially sacrificed her own prospects in order to love Naomi. And as we will see later in Ruth, God uses this sacrifice to help fulfil his cosmic plan. We never know how God will use our acts of love and obedience to bring about his plans and purposes. *Ruth, once saved, refuses to let go of God & his people*

Also, a much better response to suffering.

So who do you identify with in the story?

Whoever it is, most important point is to know that God is working, both in Ruth's time & now, to bring people to know him.

- We can be involved with that - show them Jesus

- We can come to know God through Jesus