



HOPE AND REDEMPTION

(4 BIBLE STUDIES)

EXAMINAPPLICATION

BIBLE STUDIES

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THE SMALL PRINT

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Your Commitment

I would encourage you to make a commitment to attending your group regularly. I realise that sometimes there are things that get in the way, but do prioritise studying the Bible with other. This will involve sacrifice, and effective use of your time, but I really believe that in doing so you will get the most out of studying the Bible and praying together in your small group.

Your Contribution

What you put into the group is going to determine what you get out of the group. I encourage you to contribute honestly to the discussion and workings of the group. I understand people come from different backgrounds with unique personalities & life experiences. But, we all have a big part to play, so I encourage you to be fully present and take ownership of your group.

Your Preparation

These materials are primarily for use in preparing and/or leading group discussions, but they will also be useful in keeping your thoughts together in one place. The materials provide you with the passage so that you can identify and highlight recurring themes and note down your own thoughts and questions. Also, the materials include questions designed to provoke thought, and help you reflect on what the passage meant, both at the time it was written, and also what it means for us now.

I would encourage you to make good use of these materials, as doing so will help you contribute and get the most out of the group discussions. The materials are, however, only “tools” – they are there to help you, and not to restrict you, or force you to think in a certain manner. I want to see God speaking to you through these passages, and if the questions or notes don't help you, simply don't use them!

I have also included within these materials an introduction to the book. Make of this what you will, but I hope that it is helpful in getting you started with these studies!

Your Leadership

Here are some useful pointers in how to lead your Bible study group. Be aware that included in this study guide are more questions than you can possibly ask and/or answer in one session. They are not designed to be used rigidly, and there will rarely be a need to ask every question! Make sure that you spend some time praying at the start and ensure you read & re-read the passages as much as possible. In relation to the passages, then consider the suggested questions with an open mind. There is rarely “a single right answer” and I would encourage you to share your thoughts with your group.

I have also included a number of quotations from relevant Christian literature, most of which are readily available online if you want to do further thinking or study. My prayer is that as you study together you would grow to love Jesus and experience Him more deeply.

I would appreciate your feedback and suggestions on how to make these materials even better!

*Steve McClure
Spring 2019*

INTRODUCING RUTH

The story of Ruth is set in the time of the Judges. This period was a difficult time for the people of Israel and twice we read that “In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as they saw fit” (Judges 17:6, 21:25). Following the death of Joshua, Israel entered a period where it became somewhat wayward in its obedience to God. They were frequently under attack from the surrounding nations and so there is a cycle of the people calling out to God and God sending a Judge to rescue them. These Judges were an interesting bunch of people and included the likes of Othniel (Judges 3:9-11), Ehud (Judges 3:11-29), Deborah (Judges 4-5), Gideon (Judges 6-8), Abimelech (Judges 9), Jephthah (Judges 11-12:7) & Samson (Judges 13-16). These were the six main judges but there were 6 others including Shamgar (3:31), Tola and Jair (10:1-5), Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon (12:8-15).

The book of Ruth begins by placing it within this period “when the judges ruled” (1:1). It was written during a time of peace between Israel and Moab but we are told that there was famine in the land. So a man called Elimelek (along with his wife Naomi and their two sons Mahlon and Killion) went to live in Moab. Sadly Elimelek died there in Moab as did both of his sons who had married Moabite women (Ruth and Orpah) during the 10 years they had lived in Moab. Following their deaths Naomi decides to return to her home in Israel, and her daughter-in-law Ruth chooses to go with her.

The book of Ruth is not clearly dated but must have been sometime between the conquest of Canaan (1375 BC) and the birth of David (1040 BC). The reference to the lineage of King David (4:17-22, Matthew 1:1-5), and the literary style of the book suggests that the book of Ruth was written at some point after David became King. The book of Ruth has two strong themes:

1. Kindness: As a foreigner (a Moabitess) it was quite a big deal for Ruth to return with Naomi to the land of Israel. Her sister Orpah chose to stay but we are told that Ruth *clung* to Naomi (1:14). This selfless choice would change the whole direction of her life. She chose to stay with her mother-in-law who really was a broken woman having lost her husband and her two sons. Step by step however God draws Naomi back to Himself as He shows her His Sovereignty and kindness even in the midst of adversity. Kindness is in fact a major theme of the book as we see the kindness of Ruth (in staying to serve her mother-in-law rather than looking to her own interests), the kindness of Boaz towards Ruth (in protecting her, providing for her and eventually stepping up to marry her) and the kindness of God in weaving this broken family into the lineage of His own son.

“May the LORD repay you for what you have done. May you be richly rewarded by the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge.”

Ruth 2:12

These kindnesses bring blessing out from the jaws of tragedy: hope from a place of hopelessness and they give us a picture of the self-giving love of God towards a broken, hopeless and needy world.

2. Redemption: Without a doubt the other major theme in the book of Ruth is that of Redemption. Indeed the word is used twenty three times. The law provided for the redemption of property by a near relative and marriage to provide a widow with an heir (See Deuteronomy 25:5-6). Boaz was indeed a

close relative of Naomi (though not in fact the closest) and fulfilled these roles: redeeming the family property (4:9), marrying Ruth (4:10, 13) and giving her an heir (i.e. Obed 4:13, 17).

Surely the story of Ruth is a redemption story that turned around the fortunes of both Ruth and Naomi. For Ruth there was marriage, there was the chance to be a mother and also the chance to be woven into the genealogy of both David and Jesus. For Naomi there was a transformation from despair, insecurity and hopelessness to blessing, security and hope. The transformation from the bitter hopelessness we see in Naomi in 1:20-21 to the new hope in 3:16-18 and her friend's excitement in 4:13-17 from is staggering.

¹⁴ The women said to Naomi: 'Praise be to the LORD, who this day has not left you without a guardian-redeemer. May he become famous throughout Israel! ¹⁵ He will renew your life and sustain you in your old age. For your daughter-in-law, who loves you and who is better to you than seven sons, has given him birth.

Ruth 4:14-15

There are also parallels with the nation of Israel. Just as Ruth and Naomi had experienced this story of transformation in their lives, so transformation for the whole of Israel was also coming through this story. Israel's redemption was to come through David's son, Jesus Christ.

"Ruth is the story of God's providential workings in the lives of ordinary people to achieve His purposes – not only in blessing them as individuals but in advancing His historic plan for Israel as a nation and humanity as a whole. Ruth forms part of God's secret plan that was to find its fulfilment and culmination in Christ – Christ is the climactic redeemer and King, next to which all previous redeemers and kings are shadows and prefiguring's."

David Atkinson

Ruth was welcomed into the people of God. So also in Christ we are redeemed and are "no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household" (Ephesians 2:19). God's redemptive work finds its fulfilment in and through Jesus Christ.

Steve McClure, Spring 2019

STUDY 1 – RUTH 1 – THE JOURNEY HOME

INTRODUCTION: The time of the Judges was characterised by a cycle of sin, oppression, salvation then sin again (Judges 2:11-19). In contrast Ruth ends with the genealogy of David showing how God sovereignly gave them a good King. In chapter 1 we are introduced to the main characters who are facing tragedy following the death of Naomi's husband Elimelek and her two sons Mahlon and Killion.

SETTING THE SCENE: Think of a time when you have faced difficult circumstances or tragedy: what was the impact of this time on you and particularly on your relationship with God? What things helped to keep you walking with Jesus?

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DEALING WITH TRAGEDY (v1-5): What was the big deal about Elimelech (meaning God is my King) and Naomi leaving Judah for Moab (see Deut 23:3-6, Judges 3:12-15,26-30)? What had God promised in Deuteronomy 28 (contrast v1-8 with v15-24) about His provision for them in the land?

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Having lost her husband, her two sons and not having grandchildren to carry on the family line how would you imagine that Naomi was feeling at this point? How do you think her view of God would have been changed because of such sadness and loss?

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RUTH AND ORPAH (v6-18): What is Naomi's rationale about why both Ruth and Orpah should both return home? Why do you think that Ruth insists on going back to Judah with Naomi despite her strong encouragement to go home? Why do you think Orpah stays?

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What did Ruth sacrifice in order to "cling" to Naomi and go back to Judah with her? What would this level of love and commitment to another look like for us today?

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NAOMI'S BITTERNESS (v19-21): Noting the contrast between Naomi (meaning pleasant) and Mara (meaning bitter) how do you respond to such bitterness (see v13, 20 & 21)? To what extent do you think that she is right to be so angry (v20-21) at the LORD for what had happened? Can you think of times in your own life when circumstances have caused us to distrust God and become bitter?

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A QUESTION OF FAITH: When have you been tempted to blame God for the things that have gone wrong in your life? What can we learn from Naomi's lack of faith and her inability to see God at work in all that was happening in her life? What do we learn here about Ruth's faith when she says "Your people will be my people and your God my God" (v16)?

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SIGNS OF HOPE (v22): Despite Naomi's bitterness and Ruth's self-sacrificial love and commitment to her mother-in-law, what signs of hope do we see emerge, both throughout the chapter and especially here at the end in preparation for the next part of the story and why is this so significant?

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DRAWING IT TOGETHER: Where do you see God at work in the lives of these characters and the things they faced? What can we learn from them and how they responded to these things (e.g. commitment, faith and discipline as opposed to anger, bitterness)?

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IDEAS FOR PRAYER: Share with one another about which of the characters in the story you most identify and why. Pray for one another about how you are responding to struggles circumstances or events in your own life. Encourage one another and pray for faith in adversity.

MEMORY VERSE: RUTH 1:16

STUDY 2 – RUTH 2 – SAFE REFUGE

INTRODUCTION: In chapter 2 we are introduced to Boaz (Elimelek's relative and therefore a *guardian-redeemer*). We begin to get a taste for how God is going to use him in the lives of Naomi and Ruth. This chapter is a great reminder of how God comes through for us when we trust in Him.

SETTING THE SCENE: What do you think the implications would have been for Ruth coming to Israel as an exile from Moab at this time? Ruth needed a safe refuge. Thinking of yourself, where is your safe refuge and what is it about that place that makes you feel safe?

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RUTH'S INITIATIVE AND BOAZ'S INTRODUCTION (v1-7): What is gleaning all about? What do the gleaning laws (Deut 24:19-22 & Leviticus 19:9-10) teach us about God's heart for the poor, widows and foreigners? How do the 'gleaning' laws (above) help us to understand Boaz's behaviour towards Ruth? What might this look like for us today in terms of how we use our time, energy and resources?

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What do you think motivated Ruth to take such initiative of her own back? What do we learn here about Boaz in respect of his character, godliness and relationship to Ruth and Naomi?

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RUTH'S BACKGROUND AND TREATMENT (v8-16): Why does the passage emphasise that Ruth was a Moabitess (v2,6 & 21)? What do we know about Moab (see Gen 19:36-37 & Num 25:1-3) and why would this have been significant knowledge to Boaz?

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Given what Boaz knew of Moab why do you think he goes the extra mile to help Ruth (above and beyond the gleaning laws) and provide, protect and care for her (see v8,9,14,15 &16)? Why is Ruth so

surprised by and grateful for Boaz' undeserved treatment of her (v10, 13)? How does Boaz's treatment of Ruth mirror Ruth's treatment of Naomi? How can we do likewise?

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What does Boaz mean when he prays that Ruth would be richly rewarded by God 'under whose wings she had come to take refuge' (v 12)? To what extent do you expect goodness and blessing from God?

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BOAZ AS GUARDIAN-REDEEMER (v17-23): As Ruth tells Naomi about Boaz's kindness to her do you notice any difference in Naomi and how she views God? How was she also provided for through Boaz's kindness (v17-18)? Who is she referring to when she speaks of the 'living and the dead' (v20)?

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What is a 'guardian-redeemer' (meaning next-of-kin or close blood relative) and what are their responsibilities (Lev 25:23-25, Deut 25:5-10)? How might this knowledge help us to understand why Boaz goes out of his way to help Ruth?

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DRAWING IT TOGETHER: Where do you see God at work in the events of this chapter? In particular what aspects of God's character do we see in the behaviour of Boaz towards Ruth and how therefore might he be a 'type of Christ'? How should this chapter encourage us to trust in God?

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IDEAS FOR PRAYER: Think and pray together about opportunities to show this level of gracious kindness to those who are in need. Pray that each of you would model these Boaz (and therefore also Jesus) qualities in your daily lives. Encourage one another that God cares for you in this way too.

MEMORY VERSE: RUTH 2:12

STUDY 3 – RUTH 3 – THE GUARDIAN-REDEEMER

INTRODUCTION: In chapter 3 the drama is starting to reach its climax as Naomi encourages Ruth to approach Boaz in order to fulfil his role as her Guardian Redeemer. We too are waiting for our great wedding to our great redeemer and we too must wait patiently in all righteousness.

SETTING THE SCENE: What do you understand it means to save or redeem something? In what ways have you experienced redemption in your own life? Where Ruth is at this point and what does she needed redemption from?

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NAOMI'S ENCOURAGEMENT (v1-6): Given what we saw last time about Moab (the product of an illegitimate sexual union between a younger woman and an older man) what's extraordinary about Naomi's encouragement to Ruth? Why is Naomi so motivated to find a home (rest) for Ruth?

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What is the significance of the time, the manner and the circumstances in which Ruth approaches Boaz? To what extent does Ruth remain true to her background as a Moabite?

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AN UNUSUAL FIRST DATE (v7-11): We saw the tension between Ruth and Boaz building in 2:11-13 as they showed mutual respect for one another. To what extent is this 'prescriptive' of how we should go about wooing our potential spouse, i.e. which parts of the story are helpful and which are not?

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What is the significance of the image of 'spreading the corner of your garment' (see 2:12 and Ezekiel 16:8)? How can we understand such a positive response from Boaz (imagine how you might feel if this happened to you)?

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THE GUARDIAN-REDEEMER: The 4 functions of a Guardian-Redeemer were (1) Avenger of blood (Num 35:13), (2) marry the widow and provide security for her (Deut 25:5-10), (3) provide a seed for / guard the inheritance of the deceased (Deut 25:6) and (4) buy brother out of poverty (Lev 25:23-25)

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Which of the functions of a Kinsman redeemer is Ruth asking Boaz to honour here? What do you therefore think was motivating Boaz and Ruth to marry? How is what happened quite different from what might have happened here (note Ruth's humility and Boaz's unwillingness to take advantage)?

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"Ruth's "last kindness" here is not so much that foxy Ruth has chosen old Boaz but the lengths of kindness she is willing to go to for Naomi – to marry someone she wouldn't naturally have married (someone older than her) to make sure Naomi is cared for and has a seed." Dave Anthony

ANOTHER GUARDIAN-REDEEMER (v12-18): How do you understand Boaz's willingness to help amidst his caution with regards to the other Guardian-Redeemer? Why did Boaz not want anyone to know that she had been to the threshing floor with him (v14)?

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How do you imagine Ruth felt as she waited for Boaz to speak with the other Guardian-Redeemer? What can we learn from this as we too wait for our Guardian-Reemer (Jesus) to return?

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DRAWING IT TOGETHER: What do you find most encouraging or challenging from the example of Naomi (e.g., initiative, wisdom, state of mind), Ruth (e.g., courage, humility, waiting) and Boaz (e.g., Godly character, self-control, obedience to God) in this chapter?

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IDEAS FOR PRAYER: Pray through some of the lessons that you have learned from this extraordinary chapter. Thank God together for our Guardian Redeemer, Jesus Christ.

MEMORY VERSES: RUTH 3:10-11a

STUDY 4 – RUTH 4 – JOY AND REDEMPTION

INTRODUCTION: Boaz is one of several clansmen who have the right to be Guardian-Redeemer for Ruth. He was willing to step up and marry Ruth (the widow) and provide a seed for Elimelek (both sons died childless). Yet it was buying a brother out of poverty which provides the drama for chapter 4.

SETTING THE SCENE: Why is it so hard to see the big picture in the midst of some of the difficult situations we face in life? Consider the journeys that Naomi and Ruth have been on: where are they at this point and what does it appear that God has been doing in them?

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THE CHANCE TO REDEEM (v1-10): What can we learn from the way that Boaz goes out of his way to ensure that the other 'Guardian-Redeemer' is given a chance to redeem? Why do you think that Boaz initially draws it to his attention in terms of the 'redemption of property'?

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What puts this other redeemer off once he learns that there is a widow involved (compare Numbers 27:8-11 with Deut 25:5-10)? Why would doing so have run the risk of endangering his own estate (v6)?

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On the other hand, why was not redeeming Ruth a flagrant and serious sin for this man as the closet redeemer? What could or should have been the penalty paid (see Deut 25:8-10 or even Gen 38:2-11)? What similarities are there between these two redeemers and the Kings Saul & David?

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ELDERS BLESSINGS (v11-12): What is the significance of the blessings that Ruth would be 'like Rachel and Leah' (v11), that Boaz would have 'standing' (v11) and that Boaz's family would be like that of Perez (v12, Gen 49:10, Lev 18:15, Deut 23:2-3, 1 Kings 7:21, Rev 3:12)?

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NAOMI'S JOURNEY (v13-17): What is the big picture of how God has moved Naomi from a place of struggle (in the face of personal loss, struggling to trust, bitterness & discouragement to a place of blessing (new life, new hope and starting to trust God again?

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GOD'S BIG PICTURE (v18-21): What is the big picture of how God has been working out His purposes here? How have Naomi and Boaz's prayers been answered (1:9, 2:12) here? Why is it so significant that God has included Ruth in the genealogy of David/Jesus (Matthew 1:5)?

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As you look back over Boaz's role in this story how does he point not only to David (as God's rightful King rather than Saul) but to Jesus as God's future redeemer?

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DRAWING IT TOGETHER: Why do you think that we have the story of Ruth in our Bibles? Read Ephesians 2:11-22 and note the similarities here with the story of Ruth? What have we learned about God's faithfulness, kindness, willingness to bless and sovereignly control of events? How have you seen God working behind the scenes to work out his purposes in your life? What is your part to play?

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IDEAS FOR PRAYER: Thank God for all that He has been teaching us through the book of Ruth and for the fact that His heart is to see people from all nations coming to know Him. As God to help each of see more of what He is doing in your lives day by day.

MEMORY VERSES: RUTH 4:13-14

MEMORY VERSES

WEEK 1: RUTH 1 – THE JOURNEY HOME

¹⁶ But Ruth replied, 'Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God.'

Ruth 1:16

WEEK 2: RUTH 2 – SAFE REFUGE

¹² May the LORD repay you for what you have done. May you be richly rewarded by the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge.'

Ruth 2:12

WEEK 3: RUTH 3 – THE GUARDIAN REDEEMER

¹⁰ 'The LORD bless you, my daughter,' he replied. 'This kindness is greater than that which you showed earlier: you have not run after the younger men, whether rich or poor. ¹¹ And now, my daughter, don't be afraid. I will do for you all you ask.'

Ruth 3:10-11a

WEEK 4: RUTH 4 – JOY AND REDEMPTION

¹³ So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. When he made love to her, the LORD enabled her to conceive, and she gave birth to a son. ¹⁴ The women said to Naomi: 'Praise be to the LORD, who this day has not left you without a guardian-redeemer. May he become famous throughout Israel!'

Ruth 4:13-14