

# Ruth: An Introduction and Overview

*Book of Ruth*

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Today we begin a new book after almost six years in the Gospel of John, and I promise this one won't be six years. I think I'm pretty safe on this one. In praying about what to preach on next, one of the patterns that I've had in my ministry was to go from the New Testament to the Old Testament to the New Testament to the Old Testament, back and forth because of the importance of the Old Testament in filling out and helping us understand the New. I think it gives us just a depth and richness, and you think about in the early church, like in Acts 17:11 where we are told that the Bereans were more noble minded than anyone that there was in Thessalonica because they searched the Scriptures to see if what Paul was saying as he preached Christ to them was true. Paul is preaching Jesus as the Savior, Jesus as the fulfillment and the essence of the Gospel and how did they check it out? They went to the Old Testament. "Is this true? Is this consistent?" So the Old Testament is such a rich book and after being in John where we saw just such, and as we talked about that last message, the glory of the Gospel of John, just the way God in his providence allowed John to live a long life, to have lots of time to meditate in the word, to grow in grace, and so he had a depth and a breadth to his Gospel. I wanted to go to a book that celebrates the love of God and the Gospel itself in the Old Testament. It's a much smaller book.

So turn with me in your Bibles in the Old Testament to the book of Ruth. Just before 1 Samuel, just after the book of Judges. If you want to turn in your Pew Bible, we're going to read extensively there; page 199 is the blue Pew Bible which is the NASB, the New American Standard, just like I'm reading. There are some of those in the backs of the chairs. The title of the message is "Ruth: An Introduction and Overview," and so we're going to just kind of introduce the book this morning, give you an overview so that we have sort of the lay of the land as we dig in next week into chapter 1. It's so important to interpret things in context and so we're going to try to get the sense of the whole book this morning.

Now as part of my introduction, I'm going to go through some just little details and then when we get, after we read the Scripture, there will be two main points later, but right now there are some preliminary observations that are going to be kind of brief just to give you a heads-up on that, and we're going to talk about the title, the author, the date, this kind of thing. These are these preliminary observations. The title, of course, is the word

"Ruth." It is named for one of the three main characters in the book. It is named for Ruth, the Moabitess. It's the only book in the Old Testament Canon that was named for a Gentile which makes it extraordinary.

The author, the text does not tell us who the author is and, in fact, nowhere in the Bible...sometimes we're told in other places who wrote a book. Like, for instance, Moses doesn't say Moses wrote Genesis when he writes Genesis, but Jesus tells us Moses wrote Genesis in the New Testament. We're told other places throughout the Old Testament even that Moses wrote those books, but we're not told anywhere who wrote Ruth. We just know it was an unnamed author inspired by the Holy Spirit. Jewish tradition says Samuel. I doubt that myself. I think Jewish tradition is wrong here but it's possible.

The date of writing. We don't know for this either, obviously, so we don't know the author himself. We can't date the book precisely but we have a clue in chapter 4, verse 7 where we're told about a custom that is happening. As the narrative unfolds, because we have in this book, it's a beautiful story of the glorious events surrounding this woman Ruth and her mother-in-law Naomi, we have in that story, we have an event where they are trying to work out a legal custom and we're told about a custom that happens where they would take off a sandal and hand it to someone and this was a way of publicly saying, "Everybody look. Everybody watch. This is now an agreement. It's settled." And I bring that up because in chapter 4, verse 7 when it is brought up, we're told there they used to do this formerly in Israel. Now, that helps us date the book. It means it wasn't right after the events of the book. You know, you don't have to tell somebody about a custom that is ongoing. So it's apparently somewhat removed from the book, I mean from the events of the book. The writing happen sometime afterwards. I tend to think it was sometime during the divided monarchy. That's my best guess, the divided monarchy where they had Israel in the north and Judah in the south, between 931 and 720. Anyway, I'll explain that more as we go along but that's all we can say about the date right now.

Now the setting of the events or the date of the events themselves, not the date of the writing but the date of the events. It's always important as we interpret Scripture to think this way. I mean, think back to John's Gospel for a moment, John's Gospel is recording events that happened basically between 30 and 33 A.D. The ministry of Jesus. The date of the setting is 30-33 but we talked about when did John write? Probably 85 or 90 A.D., some 50-55, 56 years after the events. Well, here the question is when is the date of the events themselves, and that's very clear, at least in a ballpark way, given to us in the first verse; this happened during "the days when the judges ruled," and the judges ruled from 1350 BC to 1050 BC. So somewhere in that period of time these events happened.

Now, that also tells us something about the setting of the people in this story. The period of the judges was a time of social upheaval. There were repeated cycles as you read through the book of Judges, cycles of spiritual apostasy, people turn away from God, turn to idolatry, turn to sin, God then would bring judgment upon them, a nation around them would oppress them, whether it be the Midianites or the Moabites or the Philistines, they would begin oppressing a part of Israel, then the people would cry out to God, God would raise up a judge who would deliver them: Samson, Gideon, these are some of the judges.

But that period of time was, basically what you see as you read through Judges, it was kind of a spiral like you have the people, they sin, God brings judgment, they get to the bottom and they cry out, and the Lord sends a judge and he delivers them, and that they sin again and they cry out to God and he sends a judge and he delivers them, but there is a downward movement throughout the book. You see the judges kind of get more and more morally ambiguous as you go through the book. You have Gideon, Jephthah, and Samson in the end, the last judge that is talked about, and so you see even the men of God that he raises up are morally ambivalent, not good models, role models, so that there is this descending moral and spiritual descent throughout the book of Judges and it comes to a head in the last five chapters, chapters 17 to 21, where it becomes clear in those chapters that apostasy has become so prevalent, idolatry is so dominant, moral confusion is so great that now the people, as you read through those last five chapters of Judges, the situation is dark. You see sin committed that was like the sin committed by the ungodly heathens that lived in Canaan before God sent them in. The Benjamites committing the same kind of atrocity, wanting to participate in homosexual rape in the same way that Sodom, the same kind of sin Sodom was destroyed for. This is the period of the judges. Now, in that setting, against that dark backdrop, God puts this beautiful image and spectacle of faithful followers of Yahweh.

The contours of the story. There are four chapters, 85 verses in all, and what we have here is really a riveting story. It's a compelling drama. It has aesthetic beauty, artistic genius about it. I mean, all of Scripture is perfect and God-breathed but this we see, as we said with John, the Lord uses human instruments and the writer that he uses in putting together the book of Ruth is a wonderful, artful writer and the story is captivating. And when we come to a narrative that is a story, God is recording true events but he's telling us the details according to how he wants to tell them, we need to remember that we are intended to be, in a sense, caught up into the plot. As we read through Ruth, we are intended to feel, to see what the characters see, to experience what they experience, to feel what they felt, and in doing so, the Lord then teaches us spiritual truths that relate to our lives.

We are going to see in this book the bitter suffering of Naomi and Ruth; the uncertainty and danger that came upon these two widows without any means of support, and then the joy caused by small acts of extraordinary kindness. You see the delight of a love story and the suspense associated with it. So we are in a sense to, as we come to this book, we need to be prepared to see what God is teaching but realizing he gave it to us this way. I had a professor who wrote a book at RTS, Richard Pratt, "He Gave Us Stories," was the title of the book. "He Gave Us Stories," he was talking about the fact that most of the Bible is narrative. The largest genre in all of Scripture is narrative. It is the telling of stories, what happened. And the Lord does that because he knows that he made us, he knows we love stories and he made us to love stories and, in fact, the whole plan of salvation is him unfolding this glorious story that shows the glory of who he is. So as we read this book, we need to come together with that kind of mindset, enjoying it.

I read, Sinclair Ferguson has a commentary on Ruth, an exposition of Ruth and he said in his introduction that one of the things we need to do is enjoy the book and he said in

preaching at his church that he at this time was pastor at First Presbytery, Columbia, South Carolina, he said that he would often have people come and say after church, "You know, I really enjoyed that. Oh, I shouldn't say that," after the message, you know. "I really enjoyed the message today." And he said after a while he started saying, "No, it's okay to say that because God wants us to enjoy his word." We as his people should come and, yes, the word breaks us, it humbles us, but even when it does that, it's doing that for redemptive purposes so that we come out joyful, as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing, even in the most painful of messages for us. So we come to this book to do that.

Now, what we're going to do this morning in introducing the book, the best way I think I can introduce the book of Ruth is to do something a little unorthodox. I'm going to read the entire book for us this morning and I want to say, I want to give a caveat, when I was out at Shepherds Conference 2015, the Inerrancy Summit, Mark Dever began reading Psalm 119. He didn't announce to us he was going to read the whole thing and then afterwards he sort of, and he's reading to a bunch of pastors and he basically said, "I wonder how long it took you to start asking the question, is he going to read the whole thing?" 176 verses, Psalm 119. I'm only going to go half that far, 85 verses.

So what I want you to do, I want you to listen carefully and I'd like you to read along. If you'd like to look at the NASB, that's the blue Bible there, page 199 in the NASB blue Pew Bible, and I want you just to see that the whole scope, when you study a book, it's always good to take time to read it through anyway and we're going to do this together.

Ruth 1:1. Before we do, let's pray together.

*Father, we ask that you would open the eyes of our hearts, that you would by your Spirit apply your word to us, unveil for us the glory of your sovereign plan, unveil for us the reality of our need, our sin, our need for Christ, and unveil for us the glory of your Son. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Before I begin reading, I want to point out one of the reasons I chose this book is because it is one of the most beautiful portraits in the Old Testament of Jesus Christ. It is an amazing and astonishing and breathtaking portrait of Jesus Christ written, as I said, probably 7-900 years before the birth of Christ, and what we see is we see in a typology he is, as we read earlier, he's the kinsman, the close relative that can redeem. To be redeemed, to be delivered from slavery, from poverty, we need a close relative to pay the redemption price and we're going to see that unfold for us.

Ruth 1. We're also going to see the Lord work in the lives of some people who go through some great suffering. Chapter 1, verse 1,

Ruth 1:1 Now it came about in the days when the judges governed, that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of Bethlehem in Judah went to sojourn in the land of Moab with his wife and his two sons. 2 The name of the man was Elimelech, and the name of his wife, Naomi; and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion, Ephrathites of

Bethlehem in Judah. Now they entered the land of Moab and remained there. 3 Then Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died; and she was left with her two sons. 4 They took for themselves Moabite women as wives; the name of the one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth. And they lived there about ten years. 5 Then both Mahlon and Chilion also died, and the woman was bereft of her two children and her husband. 6 Then she arose with her daughters-in-law that she might return from the land of Moab, for she had heard in the land of Moab that the LORD had visited His people in giving them food. 7 So she departed from the place where she was, and her two daughters-in-law with her; and they went on the way to return to the land of Judah. 8 And Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go, return each of you to her mother's house. May the LORD deal kindly with you as you have dealt with the dead and with me. 9 May the LORD grant that you may find rest, each in the house of her husband." Then she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept. 10 And they said to her, "No, but we will surely return with you to your people." 11 But Naomi said, "Return, my daughters. Why should you go with me? Have I yet sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands? 12 Return, my daughters! Go, for I am too old to have a husband. If I said I have hope, if I should even have a husband tonight and also bear sons, 13 would you therefore wait until they were grown? Would you therefore refrain from marrying? No, my daughters; for it is harder for me than for you, for the hand of the LORD has gone forth against me." 14 And they lifted up their voices and wept again; and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her. 15 Then she said, "Behold, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and her gods; return after your sister-in-law." 16 But Ruth said, "Do not urge me to leave you or turn back 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. 17 Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. Thus may the LORD do to me, and worse, if anything but death parts you and me." 18 When she saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more to her. 19 So they both went until they came to Bethlehem. And when they had come to Bethlehem, all the city was stirred because of them, and the women said, "Is this Naomi?" 20 She said to them, "Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. 21 I went out full, but the LORD has brought me back empty. Why do you call me Naomi, since the LORD has witnessed against me and the Almighty has afflicted me?" 22 So Naomi returned, and with her Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter-in-law, who returned from the land of Moab. And they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest.

Ruth 2:1 Now Naomi had a kinsman of her husband, a man of great wealth, of the family of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz. 2 And Ruth the Moabitess said to Naomi, "Please let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain after one in whose sight I may find favor." And she said

to her, "Go, my daughter." 3 So she departed and went and gleaned in the field after the reapers; and she happened to come to the portion of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the family of Elimelech. 4 Now behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem and said to the reapers, "May the LORD be with you." And they said to him, "May the LORD bless you." 5 Then Boaz said to his servant who was in charge of the reapers, "Whose young woman is this?" 6 The servant in charge of the reapers replied, "She is the young Moabite woman who returned with Naomi from the land of Moab. 7 "And she said, 'Please let me glean and gather after the reapers among the sheaves.' Thus she came and has remained from the morning until now; she has been sitting in the house for a little while." 8 Then Boaz said to Ruth, "Listen carefully, my daughter. Do not go to glean in another field; furthermore, do not go on from this one, but stay here with my maids. 9 Let your eyes be on the field which they reap, and go after them. Indeed, I have commanded the servants not to touch you. When you are thirsty, go to the water jars and drink from what the servants draw." 10 Then she fell on her face, bowing to the ground and said to him, "Why have I found favor in your sight that you should take notice of me, since I am a foreigner?" 11 Boaz replied to her, "All that you have done for your mother-in-law after the death of your husband has been fully reported to me, and how you left your father and your mother and the land of your birth, and came to a people that you did not previously know. 12 May the LORD reward your work, and your wages be full from the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to seek refuge." 13 Then she said, "I have found favor in your sight, my lord, for you have comforted me and indeed have spoken kindly to your maidservant, though I am not like one of your maidservants." 14 At mealtime Boaz said to her, "Come here, that you may eat of the bread and dip your piece of bread in the vinegar." So she sat beside the reapers; and he served her roasted grain, and she ate and was satisfied and had some left. 15 When she rose to glean, Boaz commanded his servants, saying, "Let her glean even among the sheaves, and do not insult her. 16 Also you shall purposely pull out for her some grain from the bundles and leave it that she may glean, and do not rebuke her." 17 So she gleaned in the field until evening. Then she beat out what she had gleaned, and it was about an ephah of barley. 18 She took it up and went into the city, and her mother-in-law saw what she had gleaned. She also took it out and gave Naomi what she had left after she was satisfied. 19 Her mother-in-law then said to her, "Where did you glean today and where did you work? May he who took notice of you be blessed." So she told her mother-in-law with whom she had worked and said, "The name of the man with whom I worked today is Boaz." 20 Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, "May he be blessed of the LORD who has not withdrawn his kindness to the living and to the dead." Again Naomi said to her, "The man is our relative, he is one of our closest relatives." 21 Then Ruth the Moabitess said, "Furthermore, he said to me, 'You should stay close to my servants until they have finished all my

harvest." 22 Naomi said to Ruth her daughter-in-law, "It is good, my daughter, that you go out with his maids, so that others do not fall upon you in another field." 23 So she stayed close by the maids of Boaz in order to glean until the end of the barley harvest and the wheat harvest. And she lived with her mother-in-law.

Ruth 3:1 Then Naomi her mother-in-law said to her, "My daughter, shall I not seek security for you, that it may be well with you? 2 Now is not Boaz our kinsman, with whose maids you were? Behold, he winnows barley at the threshing floor tonight. 3 Wash yourself therefore, and anoint yourself and put on your best clothes, and go down to the threshing floor; but do not make yourself known to the man until he has finished eating and drinking. 4 It shall be when he lies down, that you shall notice the place where he lies, and you shall go and uncover his feet and lie down; then he will tell you what you shall do." 5 She said to her, "All that you say I will do." 6 So she went down to the threshing floor and did according to all that her mother-in-law had commanded her. 7 When Boaz had eaten and drunk and his heart was merry, he went to lie down at the end of the heap of grain; and she came secretly, and uncovered his feet and lay down. 8 It happened in the middle of the night that the man was startled and bent forward; and behold, a woman was lying at his feet. 9 He said, "Who are you?" And she answered, "I am Ruth your maid. So spread your covering over your maid, for you are a close relative." 10 Then he said, "May you be blessed of the LORD, my daughter. You have shown your last kindness to be better than the first by not going after young men, whether poor or rich. 11 Now, my daughter, do not fear. I will do for you whatever you ask, for all my people in the city know that you are a woman of excellence. 12 Now it is true I am a close relative; however, there is a relative closer than I. 13 Remain this night, and when morning comes, if he will redeem you, good; let him redeem you. But if he does not wish to redeem you, then I will redeem you, as the LORD lives. Lie down until morning." 14 So she lay at his feet until morning and rose before one could recognize another; and he said, "Let it not be known that the woman came to the threshing floor." 15 Again he said, "Give me the cloak that is on you and hold it." So she held it, and he measured six measures of barley and laid it on her. Then she went into the city. 16 When she came to her mother-in-law, she said, "How did it go, my daughter?" And she told her all that the man had done for her. 17 She said, "These six measures of barley he gave to me, for he said, 'Do not go to your mother-in-law empty-handed.'" 18 Then she said, "Wait, my daughter, until you know how the matter turns out; for the man will not rest until he has settled it today."

Ruth 4:1 Now Boaz went up to the gate and sat down there, and behold, the close relative of whom Boaz spoke was passing by, so he said, "Turn aside, friend, sit down here." And he turned aside and sat down. 2 He took ten men of the elders of the city and said, "Sit down here." So they sat

down. 3 Then he said to the closest relative, "Naomi, who has come back from the land of Moab, has to sell the piece of land which belonged to our brother Elimelech. 4 So I thought to inform you, saying, 'Buy it before those who are sitting here, and before the elders of my people. If you will redeem it, redeem it; but if not, tell me that I may know; for there is no one but you to redeem it, and I am after you.'" And he said, "I will redeem it." 5 Then Boaz said, "On the day you buy the field from the hand of Naomi, you must also acquire Ruth the Moabitess, the widow of the deceased, in order to raise up the name of the deceased on his inheritance." 6 The closest relative said, "I cannot redeem it for myself, because I would jeopardize my own inheritance. Redeem it for yourself; you may have my right of redemption, for I cannot redeem it." 7 Now this was the custom in former times in Israel concerning the redemption and the exchange of land to confirm any matter: a man removed his sandal and gave it to another; and this was the manner of attestation in Israel. 8 So the closest relative said to Boaz, "Buy it for yourself." And he removed his sandal. 9 Then Boaz said to the elders and all the people, "You are witnesses today that I have bought from the hand of Naomi all that belonged to Elimelech and all that belonged to Chilion and Mahlon. 10 Moreover, I have acquired Ruth the Moabitess, the widow of Mahlon, to be my wife in order to raise up the name of the deceased on his inheritance, so that the name of the deceased will not be cut off from his brothers or from the court of his birth place; you are witnesses today." 11 All the people who were in the court, and the elders, said, "We are witnesses. May the LORD make the woman who is coming into your home like Rachel and Leah, both of whom built the house of Israel; and may you achieve wealth in Ephrathah and become famous in Bethlehem. 12 Moreover, may your house be like the house of Perez whom Tamar bore to Judah, through the offspring which the LORD will give you by this young woman." 13 So Boaz took Ruth, and she became his wife, and he went in to her. And the LORD enabled her to conceive, and she gave birth to a son. 14 Then the women said to Naomi, "Blessed is the LORD who has not left you without a redeemer today, and may his name become famous in Israel. 15 May he also be to you a restorer of life and a sustainer of your old age; for your daughter-in-law, who loves you and is better to you than seven sons, has given birth to him." 16 Then Naomi took the child and laid him in her lap, and became his nurse. 17 The neighbor women gave him a name, saying, "A son has been born to Naomi!" So they named him Obed. He is the father of Jesse, the father of David. 18 Now these are the generations of Perez: to Perez was born Hezron, 19 and to Hezron was born Ram, and to Ram, Amminadab, 20 and to Amminadab was born Nahshon, and to Nahshon, Salmon, 21 and to Salmon was born Boaz, and to Boaz, Obed, 22 and to Obed was born Jesse, and to Jesse, David.

I want us to the rest of our time talk about two points. We'll move pretty quickly through them. There are some sub points, of course, in each of the two points. The first point is:



three prominent themes. Three prominent themes in the book. And then the second point is going to be: one primary purpose. Three prominent themes in the book of Ruth that we need to look at as we continue then to study and dig into this book more carefully. Three prominent themes.

Our first point, the first theme is the reality of suffering. The reality of suffering. The main character in the book, I mentioned earlier it's astonishing that the book is named Ruth because she is a Moabitess; she is not a Jew; she is not born in Israel and the book is named after her. It's also astonishing in that she is really not the main character of the story. She's one of the main characters but I think you can argue convincingly that the main character in this story is Naomi.

Now, do you see how at the beginning the focus is on Naomi and her suffering? Her name, which means "pleasant one," that's the wonderful thing about Hebrew names is they actually meant something, it wasn't just a title, like our words, it's just a sound, you know, Ty, where does that come from? It just sounds like Ty, it doesn't mean anything, but in Hebrew culture, a name meant something and Naomi actually meant "pleasant one." So when she comes into town and they say, "Is this Naomi? Naomi is back," she says, "Don't call me Naomi." They are essentially saying, "Pleasant one, pleasant one is here." It sounds kind of odd, doesn't it? But that's the way it was. "Pleasant one is here." "Don't call me pleasant one, call me bitter one," Mara means bitter, "because the Lord has dealt very bitterly with me." So the focus is on her. She's in the spotlight and then surprisingly at the end when the child is born, the focus is again on Naomi. After Ruth conceives and has a child, the women come to Naomi and say to her, "Look at what's happened to you. You have a restorer. You have a sustainer." She takes the child in her lap, becomes the child's nurse and people say, "A son has been born to Naomi."

It's about Naomi's journey from emptiness to fullness. In fact, when we look back at chapter 1, chapter 1, verse 3, "Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died; and she was left with her two sons." The word "left" is a powerful verb which means "to remain; to be a remnant," but it pictures a process of devastation or elimination and that which is left standing. So she was left with her two sons, verse 3, it's the same word, the same Hebrew word that occurs in verse 5, "Then both Mahlon and Chilion also died, and the woman was bereft." "Bereft" is the same word as "left" in the Hebrew. "Bereft" in verse 5 is the same as "left" in verse 3. So in verse 3, her husband dies and she's left. Her husband has been knocked out of the way and she's still standing. In verse 5, her two sons had been mowed down and she's still standing. The one remaining person. It pictures that kind of devastation in the words themselves.

Then as we mentioned earlier, when she goes and she says to her friends, "Don't call me Naomi, call me Mara," in verse 20, "for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me." Look at what she says in verse 21, chapter 1, "I went out full, but the LORD has brought me back empty." She had a husband, she had two sons, she had dreams for the future, she looked forward to grandchildren. I mean, they had to leave Bethlehem which was sad in itself and we'll talk about next time about that. They go to Moab but they are hoping to find food and to find a future and yet she left with hopes of better days and she comes

back far worse than she left. She now is, though she is accompanied with one of her daughter-in-laws which is an amazing token of God's grace that we see happen when Ruth clings to her, that wonderful speech we heard, "Where you go I will go," God's grace at work in that. But it's still just the two of them, two women in that time period had no prospects, no hope. They are basically going to have to beg or, as Ruth is doing which is a form of begging in chapter 2, going behind the workers and picking up sort of the stuff they miss, the extra stuff. God had ordained that that would be something that the Israelites should always do, allow people to come behind you and glean what you miss, the poor.

So the reality of suffering. She goes through the loss of a husband, then she loses her two sons and you even seen the sense of hope, in verse 3, she loses her husband, she is left with her two sons, they marry and look at verse 4, "And they lived there about ten years." What should have happened? They married and then they lived there about ten years. There are no children. Just barrenness. Disappointed hopes. And then this cascade of tragedy, an avalanche of suffering and her heart is broken and it's this essential conflict is the story. You have Naomi's personal tragedy upon tragedy upon tragedy. You have the fact that her husband's name is about to be erased which was so important in the land of Israel. The inheritance will be lost. There has to be a male heir.

So all of this, the weight of that pressing in upon her, what we see in this, in the book of Ruth we see what we see throughout Scripture, that the Bible speaks to life as it really is. The Bible is not some kind of mystical happy book. It's not sort of like a Joel Osteen approach to life. The Bible speaks to life as it really is. Life in a simple word is hard. Devastation happens suddenly. Sin has wrecked this world but we have a book, we have a treasure from God that is a light to our path, a guide to our steps that deals with life as it really is. We have a way to find God's solutions to life's problems.

So the reality of suffering is one of the prominent themes. The second prominent theme, we're talking about three prominent themes, the reality of suffering is the first, the second is the power of kindness. The power of kindness. Now, what's happening? We see as we come to the end that this really...God's kindness at work in the lives of people in their real actions. Their actions of great kindness that the Lord uses to bring about a complete reversal of circumstances so that, remember at the beginning, Naomi is empty, at the end, she's full. The Lord has blessed her. How did it happen? It happened through one of the key words in the book is the word, the Hebrew word "chesed," c-h-e-s-e-d. It's one of the most important words in the Old Testament. Chesed is a word which, as one of the commentators was saying, you need a whole cluster of English words to really define it. This is why it doesn't define well. "Lovingkindness" is how the NASB reads normally when it talks about chesed, and the text here, it's usually "kindness" in this passage. When talking about God's chesed, it's "lovingkindness" or "steadfast love," but in reality, you need a bunch of words. It's basically love, mercy, grace, kindness, loyalty, all rolled up into one. That's chesed. It is essentially, it's the kindness shown by someone who is in a higher position, they have resources, they have something to give and they give to someone in abject need and there is no sense of a desire for return; there is just the

movement of the heart toward need to bless. That's chesed. It's so precious that that's God's heart.

Exodus 34:6 where Moses sees the Lord, "The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in," chesed, "lovingkindness." It goes on, that's the only word repeated, abounding in chesed, "who keeps chesed for thousands." The heart of who God is. He's a God who looks at us in our misery, our self-inflicted misery, our rebellion, and his heart is moved to action to alleviate suffering and what you see in this book is several different acts of humans doing the same thing because what happens is when God does that to you, one of the signs of really being born-again is you now have that in you to others. "We love because he first loved us. We love him because he first loved us," and when he says, "love me," what does he say? "Serve my children."

So we see this, first of all, in Ruth to Naomi. Ruth embodies chesed when she clings to Naomi. Naomi has nothing that she can give to Ruth but Ruth clings to her out of love and affection and loyalty and out of a desire, God is working in her heart to follow Naomi's God. But she blesses her, I mean, her mother-in-law is going to have to travel home alone, from Moab to Judah, but Ruth says, "No, I will stay with you and nothing is going to part us until death." She binds herself to her. That's the first evidence of chesed, and though the word is not used in that passage, later when Boaz says, remember when he wakes up and she is at his feet and he says or her, "This act of kindness is greater than the former," he's talking, and he uses the word "chesed," "This act of chesed is greater than the former," he's referring to what she did when she went with Naomi.

So the first act is Ruth to Naomi, the second is Boaz to Ruth and Naomi. When Ruth is there gleaning in the field and Boaz goes out of his way to go and comfort her, he says, "Daughter, don't go anywhere else. You are in the right place. You stay here and you glean here." Remember she says, "Why are you being so kind to me, I am a foreigner?" Then at dinnertime, he calls her over. She's sheepish, she doesn't want to come up where the reapers are, the workers; she doesn't feel worthy to even sit where the maidservants are. He calls her up and he says, "Come and sit here," and the text says, "He served her." That's chesed. Her heart is overwhelmed with that. She goes home and tells Naomi about it and Naomi described it as this kindness that he "has shown to the living and the dead," that Boaz has shown. "May the Lord bless him for that."

And the third act of chesed is when Ruth, it doesn't seem like it at first glance, but Boaz takes it this way, this act when he wakes up with her at his feet, he says, "This act of chesed is greater than the former," and what he's saying is, remember, his favorite name for her was "daughter." "Daughter, you stay in this field. Daughter, you stay here." Why? Because he's an older man and she's a young attractive woman and he's saying, "What are you doing with me?" But he recognizes she has chosen the character of a godly man to be her husband. She has followed her mother-in-law's advice but she is attracted to him because he is a man of God and she is giving herself to him, offering herself to him, actually it's a proposal of marriage. This is interesting, one of the things that is really interesting in this book is female initiative at work here in a number of places as God guides everything. It's like, you know, you ladies probably talk about among yourselves

when we're not around, if anything is going to get done, you've got to nudge us to get it done, right? So this is what's happening in the book of Ruth. She is proposing marriage when she lays at his feet and he says, "This is an act of chesed. You're showing an amazing kindness to me."

And through those three acts that are apparently in and of themselves, this story is something that is happening, this should not be on the news. This is kind of a nothing event in a nothing place and so these little acts of kindness seem so insignificant but in reality the power of God is being manifested in each of them. That's one of the amazing things, is the hand of God is at work through these small acts of kindness and what it does is motivate us to be faithful and do what God has called us to do. Serve one another. You don't realize what your act of service is doing in the kingdom. They had no idea.

So the reality of suffering, the power of kindness is the second theme, the third prominent theme is the providence of God. The providence of God is essentially the doctrine of God's sovereignty, that he governs all things. Whatsoever comes to pass, he governs all things to his appointed end which is his glory and the good of his people so that providence, "provide" is in there. He's providing blessing after blessing for his people as he glorifies his own name.

So that's what we see here. You see it in Naomi, first of all, experiencing this incredible suffering and what does she say? She rightly, though bitterly, she's not having a good attitude about it but she says, "The Lord has afflicted me, the Lord has dealt bitterly with me." Well, ultimately she's right. What did Job say when Satan attacked him? He correctly said, "The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away." Her attitude could have been better but her theology was right. The Lord had brought these things upon her. She would have never asked to go through that path and yet the Lord knows best because on the other end where she sees the fullness of all that God has done, she is now a part of this amazing story of redemption and the Lord has governed every moment.

You hear it along the way, you hear it in her complaint, "The Lord has dealt very bitterly with me." She's believing in the sovereignty of God. You also see it in some very subtle ways. I love this, chapter 2, verse 3. It's so interesting when you heard that read, when you read chapter 2, verse 1, the author is giving us a little heads-up ahead of time. He says, "Now Naomi had a kinsman of her husband, a man of great wealth, of the family of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz." Now you would expect with that information, that Naomi has told Ruth, "Listen, you need to go out and find Boaz's field." But that's not what has happened at all. The author has just told us about Boaz. Naomi isn't really cognizant of that; she's not got a strategy for that. Ruth comes up with the idea of, "Hey, look, we've got no food. We've got to do something. Let me go to the field and glean. Let me go and try to get some grain so we can have some bread tonight." And her mother says, "Go, my daughter," the mother-in-law says, "Go, my daughter," and look at verse 3, this is the providence of God, "So she departed and went and gleaned in the field after the reapers; and she happened to come to the portion of the field belonging to Boaz." Just happened into that portion of the field.

Then we see what happens as a result of that. Chapter 4, verses 13 to 15, we see the ladies in celebrating with Naomi, verse 13, "So Boaz took Ruth, and she became his wife, and he went in to her. And the LORD enabled her to conceive, and she gave birth to a son. Then the women said to Naomi, 'Blessed is the LORD who has not left you without a redeemer today.'" You see, the Lord has done this. The Lord brought a Redeemer to you. Verse 15, "May," this Redeemer, the Redeemer now, Boaz, has given you a son and "may this son be also to you a restorer of life and a sustainer of your old age," and I love this, "for your daughter-in-law, who loves you and is better to you than seven sons." Isn't that amazing? What a high praise. It's saying, "Look, Naomi, look at what has happened. You went out full but you came home empty and you thought you were empty but look at what you have now. You have a daughter that is better than seven sons and you have the joy of seeing the hand of God work in this way." The providence of God.

In fact, the name "Obed" is interesting. The name itself is from the Hebrew verb "obad" which means "to serve." "Obed" means "servant." So the name there, whether they give the name, it's probably just they were announcing the name has already been given, but they say Obed, "they named him Obed," it says. "He's the father of Jesse, the father of David," verse 17. "Obed" is "servant." You have someone who can serve you and take care of you. So God has taken care of his people. He has provided for them. He has sovereignly governed every circumstance to bring total blessing. That's what we're promised in the word of God. In Christ Jesus, we are, everything that happens happens for our good, Romans 8:28. "All things work together for good to those who love and are called according to his purpose." Now, our definition of good and God's are different. Our definition is wrong and his definition is right. We think that this isn't good that this is happening to us but in Christ Jesus, nothing but good can happen to you, and we see it illustrated in the life of Naomi.

So those are the three prominent themes and we're going to see those intersect, intertwine throughout the book as we read through the book. The last thing I want to talk about, one primary purpose. It's important to keep the primary purpose of the book in mind as you read it, as you study it. What is the primary purpose of the book? The primary purpose of this book is to unveil the glory of Christ. To unveil the glory of Christ, and you can see this explicitly really as you analyze the text because the surprise ending, the surprise ending, the book should end at 4:17a, shouldn't it? I mean, the problem we had at the beginning is resolved. Naomi's emptiness is resolved in 4:17 when, "The neighbor women gave him a name, saying, 'A son has been born to Naomi!' So they named him Obed." That should be the end but then we have, "He is the father of Jesse, the father of David." I wonder how many Jews throughout history and how many Christians when they read that book just were astonished? You get caught up in the story, the events that are happening, and then you come to the end, this is the granddaddy of David. In other words, had God not worked like he did to give Naomi a son, we would not have David, which means we would not have Christ. The line of Jesus was at stake. This is what God did and those little acts of kindness were a part of God bringing to bear his plan, bringing into being the glory of his plan.

You know, the person and work of Christ are on display in this book in an anticipatory way because what's happening is, why was this book written? I said when was it written earlier, we don't know for sure. Why was it written? It seems clear that it was written to legitimize the reign of David. It was written to the people of God, the people of Israel, the people of the southern kingdom and I think the northern kingdom, we'll see as we go through it, both kingdoms, that the ruler, the one who brings God's kingdom is David and his sons. Not Saul and his sons. Not any other tribe. Not any other potential king. Not Ahab. Not any other. Not Jeroboam. It's David and the son of David that you're to look to for the kingdom of God. That's what's going on here. In fact, it's really neat how the author paints the picture. One of the things he does, look back to chapter 1 for a minute. He first of all, remember we talked about that he begins the book, "it came about in the days when the judges ruled." I think that actually is part of the inclusio with the... "inclusio" means "the beginning and the end that wrap up a book," that's an inclusio with verse 17b to 22 of chapter 4. The end of the book and the beginning of the book. "The days when judges ruled. David is the king."

What's the whole theme of the book of Judges? I mentioned earlier the cycles of good and bad, of apostasy and judgment, but there's a key phrase repeated several times in the last five chapters of the book. It starts in 17:6, "In those days there was no king; everyone did what was right in his own eyes." Then it describes this incredible apostasy and it keeps coming back saying in chapter 18, verse 1, "In those days there was no king." More terrible apostasy. Chapter 19, verse 1, "In those days there was no king." More wickedness and apostasy. More wickedness and apostasy in chapter 20. And the last verse, turn over to Ruth 1, in the providence of God, God put the book right beside it, look at the last verse of Judges 21:25, "In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes." The message of Judges is we need God's king. Things are in disarray because we need God to rule over us through his king. We need him to send his king. Saul was the king after the people's heart. David is God's king and Ruth is coming and saying, "This is God's king. He is the one who will bring God's rule, God's righteousness. Look to David and to his seed, his descendants. That's where salvation will come."

It's interesting too that, now, this is definitely I think something that the author is doing when he says, "that there was a famine in the land." There is a lot of Old Testament resonance and the Jews would have recognized this, we should if we're reading our Old Testaments very well. There was a famine in the land. Does that sound familiar? Try Genesis 12, after God calls Abram, he's Abraham later, but Abram remember, he goes to Canaan, he's going throughout the land of Canaan and now there was a famine in the land and Abram and Sarai went down into Egypt. Genesis 26:1, "Now there was a famine in the land," and Isaac and Rebekah left Canaan and went into the land of the Philistines, the land of Gerar. Chapter 41, verse 54, now there was a famine in all of the lands but there was bread in Egypt. Jacob and his sons go down into Egypt because of a famine in the land. What is interesting in each of those accounts is that what's at stake is the line of salvation. In Genesis 12 when Abram goes down into Egypt, God has already told him, "Through your seed all the families of the earth will be blessed. Salvation is coming through your descendant." What happens? Abram, in his timidity and fear, fear of man,

gives his wife away saying, "She is my sister." Pharaoh takes her into his house, jeopardizing the line of salvation. What does God do? God acts supernaturally and gives plagues to Pharaoh's house so that Pharaoh then comes and says, "What have you done? Go away and take all this stuff with you." And he basically, Abraham plunders Egypt. God protects the line. Genesis 26, like father, like son. Isaac in the land of Gerar, Abimelech the king says, "Hey, you've got a really attractive lady there with you." Isaac, "She's my sister." So Rebekah is given to Abimelech and the same thing happens, the Lord closes the wombs of all the ladies in Abimelech's household, judgment comes upon him, God wakes him up in a dream and says basically, "I'm about to kill you." How about that? That's a nightmare. Abimelech sends him away, begging him to go and God supernaturally acts to protect the line. In Genesis 41 and following, what happened? The line is not jeopardized, thankfully the grandson is not doing that same thing, "She's my sister," but what's happening? The 12 sons are about to die of starvation. The line is about to die. Famine in the land. They go to Egypt and God delivers them there supernaturally by providing for them and supernaturally delivers them from there through his great act of the exodus.

So the author of Ruth is saying, "God built his house. He built his line through man who experienced famine like that and God supernaturally worked." Look at David. Just like Abraham, just like Isaac, just like Jacob. Then you look at the blessings that are pronounced and he's careful to record these, what the elders said to Boaz when he gets the witnesses to say, "Yes, she's your wife now." They said in verse 11 of chapter 4, "We are witnesses. May the LORD make the woman who is coming into your home like Rachel and Leah, both of whom built the house of Israel." May your wife, may she be like both Rachel and Leah. Rachel and Leah built the house of Israel. What is Ruth going to do? She is going to build the house of Israel by building the kingdom of Israel, birthing the grandson of the king.

So the message then to them was, "Don't look anywhere else other than the son of David. Don't look anywhere else. God has ordained salvation is coming through David. Keep your eyes on the line of David." Then people would say, "Well, why would we do that? I mean, David is such an unimpressive fellow. Saul is so much taller." Remember, Saul was so much taller. David is a little guy. Remember David was so unimpressive that is dad didn't even think he could be a king. Remember when Samuel comes to the house, Jesse's house and says, "God has told me one of your sons is going to be king," and so he gets all of his sons together except one. Seven boys and he marches them before Samuel and Samuel says, "No. No. No. No. No. No. Do you have any more sons?" "Yes, I've got the little guy but, you know, surely not him." But anyway they bring him in, "Yes, he's the one." Because God doesn't look on outward appearance, he looks on the heart. It's not how he looks, it's not how apparently glorious he is, God has chosen him. He is the redeemer.

You say, he has a noble lineage. Ruth, the Moabitess, is his great-grandmother. Yes. Now, let me tell you you this story about that. She was a convert. She was one of those that came and sought refuge under Yahweh's wings. She's a picture, even his family line is a picture of God's saving grace. So, you see, the person of the son of David is key and

then the work of the son of David. You have this beautiful picture of salvation and this whole idea of the kinsman redeemer, the close relative. To be bought, to have that land bought and that name carried on, it had to be someone who was a close relative. To be redeemed from potential slavery because they would have to sell the land and when the money from the land ran out, they would have to sell themselves into slavery. That's what happened to the Israelites in financially difficult times. So the redeemer comes, pays the redemption price, buys the land back for them and sets them free. So the redeemer, who can redeem you from slavery? One, a near kinsman, a close relative.

We read earlier in Hebrews, Hebrews 2, "since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives. For assuredly He does not give help to angels, but He gives help to the descendant of Abraham. Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people." The Father was telling us 7-800 years before the birth of Jesus that the Savior is going to have to come from heaven but he's going to have to be made like us. So when we come, Ruth tells us, this book is telling us that we have a Savior who can sympathize with us. We have a Savior who loves us in the same way Boaz loved Ruth and redeemed her.

There is so much glory in the word of God. The beauty of our Savior. Why would you not surrender yourself to such a glorious Savior? That's really the message of the book of Ruth. Would you say no to his love, a love that led him to leave glory and come and live in this sin-sick world, to live 30 some odd years, tempted in every way yet without sin, to give himself as a sacrifice and be made sin on the cross, experience the wrath of God for you and me, to pay the full price so that he would end up, his last words or next to last words on the cross, "It is finished. Paid in full. The redemption price is paid." And he redeems mightily everyone whose hope is in him. He buys us back from slavery, brings us to himself, brings us into his home so that we become a part of the bride of Christ. Praise his name.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

*Father, we thank you for the beauty of your plan and the beauty of your Son. We pray that you would help our hearts to be more fully surrendered to him. We pray for those that are here that have not bowed the knee to Christ, have not given themselves to Jesus. Grant them grace to repent, to turn from living for themselves, to turn from their sin and to turn to the one that is the satisfaction of every longing, the Lord Jesus Christ. We pray that your people would love you more, would be more faithful to you, would serve you more joyfully and would delight in your love. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*