

# Ruth: Part 1

## RUTH 1-4

**Baxter T. Exum (#1378)**  
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Fifteen years ago, we as a congregation were meeting in the library at Elvehjem Elementary School when somebody drove by on Labor Day weekend and happened to notice that this building was for sale. Al Ovadal and I called the Realtor and we looked at it together on Saturday, we told all of you on Sunday, all of us thought about it and prayed about it on Monday, and I believe we made an offer to purchase on Tuesday, with a closing date set for October 1. Obviously, my thoughts were swirling as to how we would pay for it and how we would manage the transition, and all of this came right as our family was about to head out of town to see my brother-in-law who was preaching at the time for the Lord's church in Niagara Falls, New York. We enjoyed our stay out there, and after a few days, we left New York on our way back home to Wisconsin very early (at maybe 5 o'clock) on Tuesday morning – Tuesday morning, September 11, 2001.

As we were coming through far northern Pennsylvania, we started hearing those first reports on the radio. We pulled into a rest stop somewhere along I-90 near Erie, Pennsylvania, and what I remember is that the fire alarm was blaring, but it seemed as if nobody cared – people were walking around dazed and rather confused. We fueled up and got back on the road, and as we got closer to Cleveland, we started hearing reports on a Cleveland radio station, that a plane was unaccounted for, that it wasn't responding, and that it might be heading for Cleveland. By the time we get to Cleveland, the city had basically been evacuated. There were practically no cars on the interstate. That plane, of course, had turned around. We kept driving, Chicago was practically empty that night, we've never made it through the city that quickly, and we made it safely back here to Madison late that night. Those were the days before smartphones, so to the best of my memory we had not seen any actual images of what happened that day until we got home. At that time, our two children were roughly the age of Colton and Bennett. The rest, of course, is history. We spent the rest of the month raising money for the purchase of this building. We had half to put down by the time we closed on October 1, and we paid off the rest over the next eleven months.

With this as background, I would like for us to look at the life of a woman who lived through some very turbulent times herself. In fact, she lived during some of the most chaotic times in the history of God's people. I am referring to Ruth, a foreign woman married to an Israelite during the time of the judges. I would invite you to turn with me to the book of Ruth (p. 431), a little book tucked in between the book of Judges and the book of 1 Samuel, and one of only two books in the Bible to be named after women.

There are times in this life when all of us will come upon difficult, even tragic, situations – trouble at work, trouble at home, trouble with our health, trouble at school, trouble on a national level – and in many of these situations, we perhaps can find some kind of encouragement from Ruth. And I say this because the family featured in the book of Ruth is rather “normal.” They are not kings and queens, but they are regular everyday people who fall on some very hard times while suffering a series of terrible tragedies.

As we begin, I want to do something a little unusual by actually starting in the previous book, the book of Judges. If you are already in Ruth, look back, please, at the last verse of Judges, the verse that comes right before the book of Ruth – Judges 21:25 – and notice, please, the political and moral climate in Israel at that time. Judges 21:25 says, **“In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.”** And so, it was a time of complete and total chaos. There was no real leadership, and in that vacuum, everybody did whatever was right in his or her own eyes. They had no commonly respected standard of authority.

I would like to do something else unusual today, and that is: I’d like to give just a brief chapter-by-chapter overview of the book using the chairs up here, and we’ll do this before reading the book of Ruth to help us get the big picture before we get to the text. And then we will actually close the lesson next week with three observations or lessons based on the life of Ruth. This morning, though, as we begin this two-part series of lessons on Ruth, let us do a quick OVERVIEW of what we are about to read.

#### I. And starting in Chapter 1, we have a chapter of WEEPING.

And you will notice on the first chair up here, we have a box of tissues. This is to help us remember what is in Ruth 1. We have a chapter of weeping. And it starts with a famine in the Promised Land. But what we need to remember is that famines were promised by God in Deuteronomy 11, where God (before they even went into the Promised Land) warned the people, **“Beware that your hearts are not deceived, and that you do not turn away and serve other gods and worship them. Or the anger of the Lord will be kindled against you, and He will shut up the heavens so that there will be no rain and the ground will not yield its fruit; and you will perish quickly from the good land which the Lord is giving you.”** Do we see the connection, then, between the last verse in Judges and the first verse of Ruth? **“Everyone did what was right in his own eyes...,”** and **“...there was a famine in the Land.”** The famine was most likely a punishment from God for disobedience.

Well, in the opening verses of Ruth, we find how one particular family handled this famine. They left. They abandoned their property and fled to the land of Moab, just east of Jerusalem. I find it interesting that when we look at a map, it appears that they probably would have crossed the Jordan in roughly the same spot where Joshua led the people INTO the promised land just a few hundred years earlier. So it’s very sad. They are giving up on God’s promise. They are going in the wrong direction. And the Moabites, of course, were terrible people. They were those who had harassed the Israelites in the past, and they were people who even sacrificed their own children to various pagan idols. But, there was food there, so we find that a man by the name of Elimelech and his wife Naomi flee to Moab along with their two sons, Mahlon and Chilion. Sometimes names can be important, so I should point out that Elimelech means “God is King,” Naomi means “pleasant,” Mahlon means “sickness,” and Chilion means “consumption” as with someone who is consumed by an illness at the end of life. We can hardly imagine naming children like that. Elimelech goes into town on the weekend, “Hey, I’d like you to meet my two boys, Sickness and Consumption!” Some have suggested that they were twins and perhaps had some kind of health struggles even from birth.

But we find in the story that Elimelech dies, leaving Naomi alone with these two young men. The two sons grow up and marry two local girls (Moabites), two women known as Orpah and Ruth. And yet within ten years, Sickness and Consumption both die, leaving Naomi with her two daughters-in-law. At this point, Naomi hears that there is now food in Israel, so she decides to go home, but as she leaves, she urges Orpah and Ruth to stay, to go home, “May God be with you, we’re done here!” Orpah ends up agreeing with that plan, staying in this dark land, but Ruth (as we will see) quite dramatically objects and insists on traveling to (what is to her) a foreign land), back to Israel.

Chapter 1, then, is a chapter of weeping – there is the sadness of the famine, there is certainly weeping over the death of Elimelech, there is certainly weeping over the deaths of Mahlon and Chilion, and then there is weeping as Naomi and Ruth separate from Orpah on their way back to Israel. And then, when Naomi arrives back home in Bethlehem, she is greeted by the local women, she tells her story, and she asks that they no longer call her “*Pleasant*,” but that they call her “*Mara*,” which means “bitterness.” “Call me bitter.” A chapter of weeping.

## II. In Ruth 2 we come to a chapter of WORKING.

Naomi and her daughter-in-law Ruth are dirt poor. So Ruth turns to working in the fields. At the end of Chapter 1, they just so happen to show up at the beginning of the barley harvest, and God’s law has a provision for those who are poor, forbidding landowners from going through their fields twice during each harvest, and allowing the poor to come in to make a second pass, a “second harvest,” so to speak. I find it interesting that we have a food pantry here in Madison known as the “Second Harvest Food Bank,” and I am sure it goes back to this rule, that those who were poor could come in and get the leftovers. In Leviticus 19:9-10, the Law said, ***“Now when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very corners of your field, nor shall you gather the gleanings of your harvest. Nor shall you glean your vineyard, nor shall you gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the needy and for the stranger. I am the Lord your God.”***

By the way, I have actually done this! In fact, it was the first time I had any clue we were somewhat poor. As I remember it, when I was about 8 or 9 years old, a farmer down in Crystal Lake called the church and said, “My equipment didn’t get every single piece of corn this year, so if the church has any poor people, they can come over and get what was missed.” And apparently my dad said, “We’ll be right over!” So we got to go through this field and get some of the leftovers. That is what happens in Chapter 2. It is a chapter of working. By the way, I do find it interesting that the landowners were not required to DELIVER food to the poor. Instead, the poor had to actually DO SOMETHING. So it was a system that took care of basic needs, it did not encourage laziness, but it encouraged hard work on the part of those who needed it the most. And I would think that you would need to be either very humble or very hungry to do this! The landowners would have servants, and you would come in behind the servants! But Ruth did this. It is a chapter of WORK.

In Chapter 2, we are also introduced to a man by the name of Boaz. Boaz is the landowner, and as we will find out in just a few minutes, Boaz takes a liking to Ruth! He sees her in the field, he sees her hard work, he hears the story of how she has helped Naomi, he is impressed, and so he starts making some special provisions and promising her protection. Remember: This is during the time of the Judges, and this was a time of national chaos. It was a dangerous time in which to live, but Boaz starts becoming Ruth’s protector and provider. But primarily, Chapter 2 is a chapter of WORK.

### III. In Ruth 3, we come to a chapter of WAITING.

There was a provision in the Law of Moses that when a husband dies and leaves his widow with no children, the husband's brother (or another close relative) is to step in and take the widow into his own family, even providing children so that the family name can continue. Well, Naomi has a plan! It just so happens that Boaz is a relative! So, Naomi encourages Ruth to make the first move, which she does. But, it turns out that there is one other relative who is closer. So, doing what is honorable, doing what is according to God's law, Boaz (even in this lawless time) follows God's law and convinces Ruth that they need to wait and that they need to give this other man a chance to take Ruth as HIS wife, as the Law allows. So, in chapter 3, they wait. They don't wait long; they wait until the next morning, but they do wait! A chapter of WAITING.

### IV. And that leads us to Ruth 4, where we have a WEDDING.

You might be thinking, "What in the world does a flip-flop have to do with a wedding?" Well, this union takes place at the city gate, a place where all of the old men would hang out to discuss the business of the city. It was the Denny's of 1200 BC. It was the Cottage Café of ancient Israel. And so in front of many witnesses, Boaz seals the deal with the very romantic swapping of a sandal, the ancient equivalent of a signed document!

With all of this as background, I'd like to read all four chapters of the book of Ruth. And so with all of this in mind, let us please pay careful attention to the word of God this morning – the book of Ruth, but starting with Judges 21:25...

<sup>25</sup> *In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.*

### RUTH 1

<sup>1</sup> *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. <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> Then Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died; and she was left with her two sons. <sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> Then both Mahlon and Chilion also died, and the woman was bereft of her two children and her husband.*

<sup>6</sup> *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. <sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> 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. <sup>10</sup> And they said to her, "No, but we will surely return with you to your people." <sup>11</sup> 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? <sup>12</sup> 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, <sup>13</sup> 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."*

*<sup>14</sup> And they lifted up their voices and wept again; and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her. <sup>15</sup> Then she said, "Behold, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and her gods; return after your sister-in-law." <sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> 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." <sup>18</sup> When she saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more to her.*

*<sup>19</sup> 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?" <sup>20</sup> She said to them, "Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. <sup>21</sup> 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?"*

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

## RUTH 2

*<sup>1</sup> Now Naomi had a kinsman of her husband, a man of great wealth, of the family of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz. <sup>2</sup> And Ruth the Moabite 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." <sup>3</sup> 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. <sup>4</sup> 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." <sup>5</sup> Then Boaz said to his servant who was in charge of the reapers, "Whose young woman is this?" <sup>6</sup> The servant in charge of the reapers replied, "She is the young Moabite woman who returned with Naomi from the land of Moab. <sup>7</sup> 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."*

*<sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> 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." <sup>10</sup> 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?" <sup>11</sup> 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. <sup>12</sup> 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." <sup>13</sup> 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."*

<sup>14</sup> *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.* <sup>15</sup> *When she rose to glean, Boaz commanded his servants, saying, "Let her glean even among the sheaves, and do not insult her."* <sup>16</sup> *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."*

<sup>17</sup> *So she gleaned in the field until evening. Then she beat out what she had gleaned, and it was about an ephah of barley.* <sup>18</sup> *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.* <sup>19</sup> *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."* <sup>20</sup> *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."* <sup>21</sup> *Then Ruth the Moabitess said, "Furthermore, he said to me, 'You should stay close to my servants until they have finished all my harvest.'"* <sup>22</sup> *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."* <sup>23</sup> *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

<sup>1</sup> *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?"* <sup>2</sup> *Now is not Boaz our kinsman, with whose maids you were? Behold, he winnows barley at the threshing floor tonight.* <sup>3</sup> *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.* <sup>4</sup> *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."* <sup>5</sup> *She said to her, "All that you say I will do."*

<sup>6</sup> *So she went down to the threshing floor and did according to all that her mother-in-law had commanded her.* <sup>7</sup> *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.* <sup>8</sup> *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.* <sup>9</sup> *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."* <sup>10</sup> *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."* <sup>11</sup> *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.* <sup>12</sup> *Now it is true I am a close relative; however, there is a relative closer than I.* <sup>13</sup> *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."*

<sup>14</sup> *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." <sup>15</sup> 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. <sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> She said, "These six measures of barley he gave to me, for he said, 'Do not go to your mother-in-law empty-handed.'" <sup>18</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> *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. <sup>2</sup> He took ten men of the elders of the city and said, "Sit down here." So they sat down. <sup>3</sup> 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. <sup>4</sup> 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." <sup>5</sup> 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." <sup>6</sup> 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."*

<sup>7</sup> *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. <sup>8</sup> So the closest relative said to Boaz, "Buy it for yourself." And he removed his sandal. <sup>9</sup> 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. <sup>10</sup> 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." <sup>11</sup> 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. <sup>12</sup> 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."*

<sup>13</sup> *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. <sup>14</sup> 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. <sup>15</sup> 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.”***

***<sup>16</sup> Then Naomi took the child and laid him in her lap, and became his nurse. <sup>17</sup> 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.***

***<sup>18</sup> Now these are the generations of Perez: to Perez was born Hezron, <sup>19</sup> and to Hezron was born Ram, and to Ram, Amminadab, <sup>20</sup> and to Amminadab was born Nahshon, and to Nahshon, Salmon, <sup>21</sup> and to Salmon was born Boaz, and to Boaz, Obed, <sup>22</sup> and to Obed was born Jesse, and to Jesse, David.***

### **Conclusion:**

Lord willing, we will be able to come together next Lord’s Day morning as we bring some very practical lessons from these four chapters. But as we close, I would just briefly ask whether Ruth’s story is your story. Through a long series of seemingly random events, Ruth found herself basically adopted into the family of God. And we have that privilege today, to be welcomed into God’s family, to be redeemed. God has already set that plan in place with the death, burial, and resurrection of His Son. And so it is now up to us to accept the message, to accept the plan. God’s plan is that we must believe in Jesus, we must repent of our sins, and we must be baptized for the forgiveness of our sins. If you are ready to make that commitment, we would love to help you with that this morning. Or maybe you are more like Naomi, already a child of God, but discouraged, torn up, or maybe even wandering off and needing to come back. Whatever the case, if we can help you make things right with God, you can let me know right now as we sing this next song. Let’s stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: [fourlakeschurch@gmail.com](mailto:fourlakeschurch@gmail.com)