

Background and Ruth Chapter 1

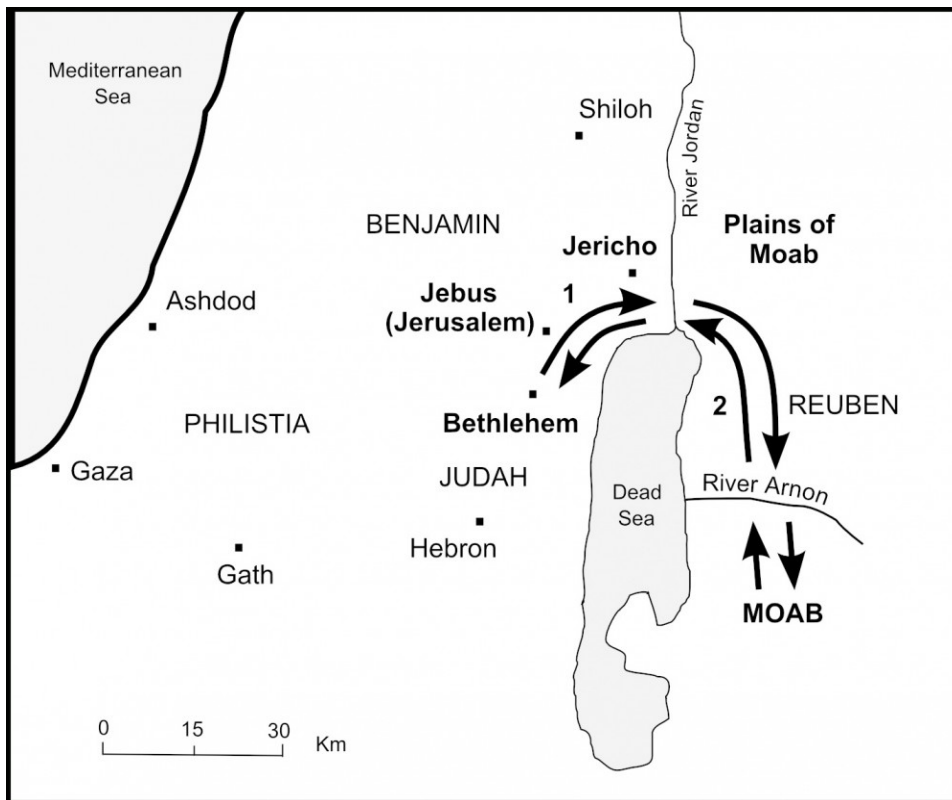
Learning Objectives

- Explore the background and basic information surrounding Ruth's story
- Clearly understand the themes of loyalty and boldness introduced in Ruth 1

Pray for your time together as a group!

Section One: Background Information

The Bible Project has a great video overview: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0h1eoBeR4Jk>



Or Google map modern day Jordan (ancient Moab) to see the realities of that journey!

Background notes:

- According to tradition, Samuel is the author
- The beginning of the lineage of Christ can be seen in this faithful woman who was a Moabite (Moab was an enemy of Israel and lay on the other side of the Dead Sea)
- The book of Ruth takes place during the time of the judges over Israel. After Joshua died there was a void of central leadership in Israel. They did not fully destroy the Canaanites, as they were instructed to, and Canaanite influence (along with other nations) began to creep into Israel's culture. Israelites were forgetting God, and he sent the judges as leaders to help redirect them

and call Israel to repentance. Following the time of the judges is when God sends kings to rule Israel.

- Ruth showed great loyalty and boldness
 - Loyalty – as an unmarried widow (and foreigner) it would've been very difficult for Ruth in Judah. It would've been easier for her to find a new husband in her home country of Moab, hence why Naomi instructs her and Orpah to stay there.
 - Boldness – in clinging to Naomi and leaving her family and homeland, trusting God

Section Two: Ruth 1

Naomi Loses Her Husband and Sons

1 In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land. So a man from Bethlehem in Judah, together with his wife and two sons, went to live for a while in the country of Moab. **2** The man's name was Elimelek, his wife's name was Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Kilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem, Judah. And they went to Moab and lived there. **3** Now Elimelek, Naomi's husband, died, and she was left with her two sons. **4** They married Moabite women, one named Orpah and the other Ruth. After they had lived there about ten years, **5** both Mahlon and Kilion also died, and Naomi was left without her two sons and her husband.

Naomi and Ruth Return to Bethlehem

6 When Naomi heard in Moab that the Lord had come to the aid of his people by providing food for them, she and her daughters-in-law prepared to return home from there. **7** With her two daughters-in-law she left the place where she had been living and set out on the road that would take them back to the land of Judah.

8 Then Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go back, each of you, to your mother's home. May the Lord show you kindness, as you have shown kindness to your dead husbands and to me. **9** May the Lord grant that each of you will find rest in the home of another husband."

Then she kissed them goodbye and they wept aloud **10** and said to her, "We will go back with you to your people."

11 But Naomi said, "Return home, my daughters. Why would you come with me? Am I going to have any more sons, who could become your husbands? **12** Return home, my daughters; I am too old to have another husband. Even if I thought there was still hope for me—even if I had a husband tonight and then gave birth to sons— **13** would you wait until they grew up? Would you remain unmarried for them? No, my daughters. It is more bitter for me than for you, because the Lord's hand has turned against me!"

14 At this they wept aloud again. Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law goodbye, but Ruth clung to her.

15 "Look," said Naomi, "your sister-in-law is going back to her people and her gods. Go back with her."

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. **17** Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if even death separates you and me." **18** When Naomi realized that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped urging her.

19 So the two women went on until they came to Bethlehem. When they arrived in Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them, and the women exclaimed, “Can this be Naomi?”

20 “Don’t call me Naomi,” she told them. “Call me Mara, because the Almighty has made my life very bitter. 21 I went away full, but the Lord has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi? The Lord has afflicted me; the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me.”

22 So Naomi returned from Moab accompanied by Ruth the Moabite, her daughter-in-law, arriving in Bethlehem as the barley harvest was beginning.

? What are some things that jump out to you in this passage?

Answers will vary

Have someone summarize verses 1-5.

Read Deuteronomy 23:3-6 and Judges 3:12-14 together.

Deuteronomy 23:3-6

³ No Ammonite or Moabite or any of their descendants may enter the assembly of the Lord, not even in the tenth generation. ⁴ For they did not come to meet you with bread and water on your way when you came out of Egypt, and they hired Balaam son of Beor from Pethor in Aram Naharaim to pronounce a curse on you. ⁵ However, the Lord your God would not listen to Balaam but turned the curse into a blessing for you, because the Lord your God loves you. ⁶ Do not seek a treaty of friendship with them as long as you live.

Judges 3:12-14

¹² Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord, and because they did this evil the Lord gave Eglon king of Moab power over Israel. ¹³ Getting the Ammonites and Amalekites to join him, Eglon came and attacked Israel, and they took possession of the City of Palms. ¹⁴ The Israelites were subject to Eglon king of Moab for eighteen years.

? Now looking back at Ruth 1:3-4, why is it significant that they are journeying to Moab and take Moabite wives?

Possible answer: It’s not a quick journey. Moab is a historical enemy of Israel and their people did not worship the God of Israel.

? Why does Naomi try to send her daughters-in-law away?

Possible answer: Naomi is unlikely to bear more sons for them to wed and will have a better chance for a life in their homeland with their Gods.

? Why would it be important for them to have husbands?

Possible answer: unmarried widows would need a source of income for daily living as well as an identity.

"It is difficult for us today to appreciate the significance of childbearing in ancient times. We live in an individualistic age in which we tend to dream of individualistic success, achievement, and prominence. That was not true in ancient times. All aspirations and dreams were for your family's success and prominence. The family was your primary identity, not your vocation, friendships and so on. It was the bearer of all hopes and dreams. Therefore there was nothing more important than to have and raise children who loved and honored you and walked in your ways. In light of this, female 'barrenness' was considered the worst possible curse. A woman in this situation could not avoid feeling a terrible failure." Tim Keller

Section Three: Beyond Basic Kindness

In verse 5, Naomi says "May the Lord show you kindness, as you have shown kindness to your dead husbands and to me." The word "kindness" in this passage is packed with meaning that we lose from the original Hebrew word *hesed*:

A strong relational term that wraps up in itself an entire cluster of concepts, all the positive attributes of God--love, mercy, grace, kindness, goodness, benevolence, loyalty, covenant faithfulness: in short, that quality that moves a person to act for the benefit of another without respect to the advantage it might bring to the one who expresses it.

Daniel Block, *Judges, Ruth*

Israel associated it [*hesed*] with Yahweh's covenant relationship with her...despite her waywardness, Yahweh always stood steadfastly by Israel in "covenant loyalty."

Robert Hubbard, Jr, *The Book of Ruth*

Love, grace, mercy, kindness--all of the positive acts of devotion that flow out of covenantal relationship.

Iain M. Duguid, *Esther and Ruth*

? Based on clues in the passage, how do you think the daughters-in-law feel about their mother-in-law?

Possible Answer: Answers will vary. Clearly there is some genuine care and love toward Naomi. We even see noted two places in the passage they wept together.

? Why do you think Ruth was insistent on staying with Naomi? What characteristics does this display? Why is this significant?

Possible Answer: Over the time she has known Naomi she has grown to know God more and wants to worship Naomi's God. She shows loyalty, bravery, trust, determination. Ruth has displayed a deep kindness (hesed) to Ruth and shows that she truly cares for her. Ruth is Moabite. She is a foreigner going to a foreign land. It would've been much easier for her to stay in her native Moab.

For Discussion And Accountability

? Where have you had to step out in faith, trusting that God will provide? Is there a situation in your life now that you can be obedient to God and take that bold step?

? Are there relationships God has given you that you have extended this "hesed" kind of love?