

Study #9

Ruth 1-4



Timeless Truth :

God's salvation shelters all.

The history of Israel's judges closes with a line that could just as well be the opening for the story of Ruth: "In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as they saw fit." (Judges 21:25) God's chosen ones looked more like TV reality show gone bad than the holy beacon of God's hope.

Israel had abandoned God's plan (again) and had become moral misfits (again) and spiritual adulterers (again). The light had almost gone out on God's people. Then God brought a foreigner onto the stage. In the darkness, the LORD showed that His beacon of hope

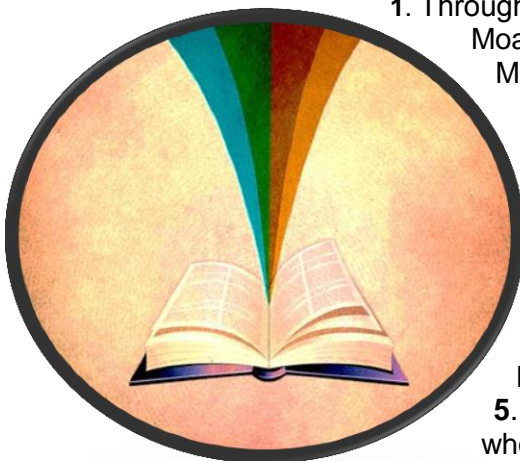
had not been extinguished. The LORD is the God who keeps His promise for all. The book of Ruth contains this, one of the most beautiful histories ever written.



Despite being set in a day when political chaos and moral pollution infested almost every nook and cranny of the country, this history contains not a single demeaning feature and is uplifting and heartwarming.

The following are examples of quiet devotion and obedience from this story:

1. Through Ruth's marriage to Mahlon, the LORD led her from a Moabite nature-worshiper to faith in the LORD and His Messiah.
2. The LORD's selfless compassion for others is clearly reflected in Ruth's choice to stay with her mother-in-law, Naomi.
3. The Lord did many acts of kindness through Ruth and Boaz who blessed those around them.
4. Ruth's inner beauty of virtue and integrity was dazzling and caught the eye, and heart, of landowner Boaz. Boaz was godly and respectfully honorable to Ruth and Naomi.
5. God blessed the union of Boaz and Ruth with a child from whom came King David and eventually Jesus Christ, the world's only Savior.





The sparkling history of Ruth happened during dark, forbidding times. Naomi's family felt compelled to flee the Promised Land because of famine. They settled in godless Moab. The national god in that country was Chemosh, who was falsely credited with good crops and successful harvests.

Chemosh worship seems to have had a taste for music, sexual activities, and blood. In 2 Kings 3:27 we find that human sacrifice was part of obeying the laws of Chemosh-family of gods. This gruesome practice was not unique to the Moabites. Human sacrifice is commonplace in the various nature cults. The great mother goddess (Gaia-Ashteroth) hooked up with the great father god (Baal-Dagon)

(sexual activities) and had terror-offspring-gods including Molech, Baal and other gods like Ashor-Chemosh, Thammuz and Baalzebub. These are bloodthirsty bully-gods (similar to Aztec gods sacrifices).

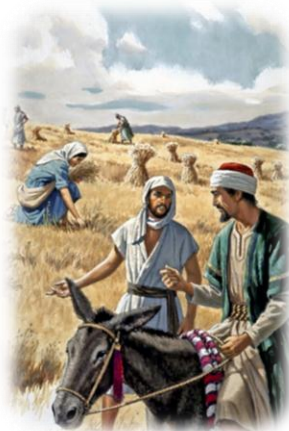
Naomi's two sons married Moabite women, Orpah and Ruth. But then Naomi's husband died.

Then both of her sons died too. Now it was just three widows, no children and no prospects for food or safety-a dark, sad place.

The true and living LORD God, all of His recorded promises and His recorded history of gracious power seemed remote and restricted.

Then Naomi heard the famine had finally lifted in Israel. She decided to return home and sent her daughters-in-law back to their homes. But Ruth refused to leave.





Her poetic declaration of loyalty and commitment offers a glimpse of her faith: *“Where you go, I will go; your people will be my people and your God my God.”* So the two of them trudged back to the Land of Promise, without husbands, or children, or any hope of success beyond survival by begging. Once there, Ruth worked at gleaning (gathering the extra grain from harvested fields).

Her harvest field *“just happened to be”* the acres of Boaz who *“happened to be a family guardian”* a close relative of Naomi’s deceased husband and sons. He *“happened to be on site”*. Boaz did a background check, admired Ruth’s work ethic and her character in providing for her aging mother-in-law.

Boaz offered his help and protection. One of the LORD’s rules back then required a close family guardian to redeem both a widow and her land. So, Naomi told Ruth to offer herself in marriage to Boaz, to let him know that she was his close relative through marriage

Boaz was pleased but knew of a closer relative who had the right of first refusal. His refusal paved the way for Boaz to fulfill his role as a family guardian or *“kinsman redeemer.”* Boaz married Ruth and redeemed her family’s land. The LORD brought joy to Naomi as He restored her faith *and* planted a family tree. Like the sing-song says:

*Ruth & Boaz, working in the field, watch how God His love revealed:
First came love, then came marriage, then
came Obed in a baby carriage.
Obed led to Jesse and Jesse led to
Dave and Dave led to Jesus—
He’s the One who saves.*

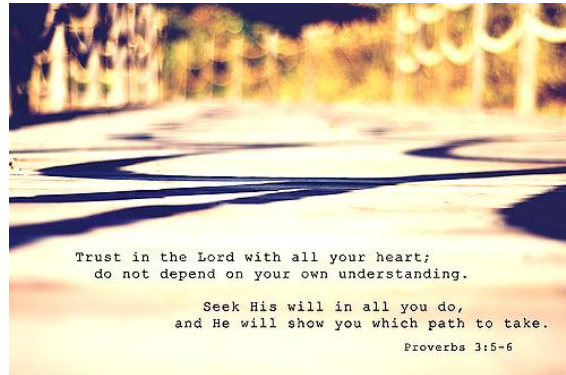
There’s no denying this history is a great romance; but Boaz’ love for Ruth reflects the greater heart of the LORD. Boaz steps in as a willing *kinsman-redeemer*. The LORD later on would step out of heaven into the same spot on earth, to Bethlehem.

Jesus is THE kinsman-Redeemer for all people. God’s plan chose some “not so chosen” people. God’s plan overwhelms every obstacle, overturn every injustice and overcome every culture and doubt in the end. Soon, all believers in the Messiah, from all nations and all languages, will see that the LORD was writing a happily-ever-after after all, and for all.



Ruth 1-4

1. What were some of the tough things Naomi was going through?
2. Why would a good God allow such things to happen to her like that, one right after the other?



3. What are ways Ruth demonstrated kindness to her aging mother-in-law?
4. What can we learn from Boaz's interactions with his workers and also with Ruth?
5. The story of Ruth tells about the LORD's Old Testament laws governing interactions with those who may be unintentionally sidelined in life. Someone says, "Our society has to do that! There's lots of poor people!" comment.
6. The word 'redeemed' is used 20 times in this book. How does Boaz' redemption of Ruth compare to Christ's redemption of us?
7. Coincidence or the LORD's divine providence? What are some examples of divine providence in this story?
8. When difficulties arise on what basis does a Christian continue to hope in God?
9. How did Ruth/Naomi's perspective slowly change? Does time heal all wounds?

Kind Time – Ask around....what can you share to encourage one another?



TIMELESS TRUTH:

TO OBEY THE LORD MATTERS.

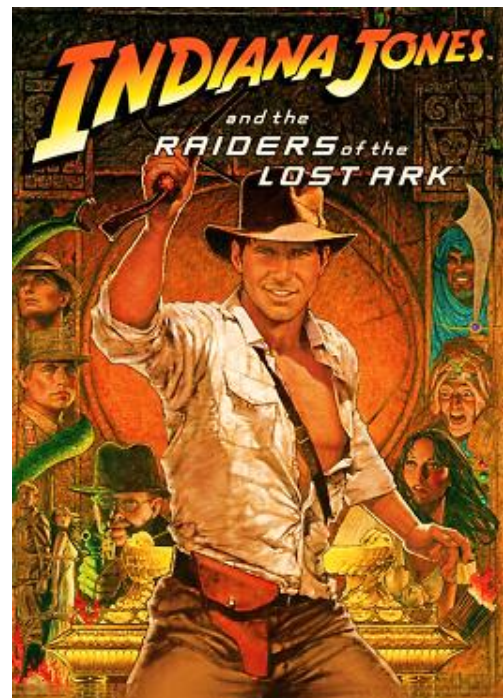
1 Samuel 1-8:

Ichabod is one of those “shudder-words”. It is far more frightening than the man chased by Washington Irving’s headless horseman. *Ichabod* means “*THE Glory is gone.*” I cannot imagine a culture that would be crying out for such a name to use for a newborn. Why remember despair? Calling a little girl “Hope-less” instead of “Hope”? Calling a boy “Crimey” instead of “Justus”? How did God’s Old Testament people come to this? What happened?



Israel was at war with the Philistines and Israel was outmatched. Israel lost their first battle with the Philistines at Aphek. How could they succeed? Finally someone went back in their history books and remembered: whenever the Ark of the Covenant went into battle with Israel, Israel won battles. So, they blamed their loss on “lack of Ark”.

Eli’s two sons stepped up to the task. Those two immoral thieves who stole sacrifices from God, were only too glad to be the pretend-heroes to carry the LORD’s Ark. In their minds Israel would win and the boys would become national heroes. Their own lack of obedience went untouched. In the next battle, using the LORD’s Ark as a good luck charm, Israel lost both the battle and the ark.



Eli had grown old and blind. The devastating news of Israel’s defeat and the death of his sons brought sadness. But at the news of the capture of the LORD’s Ark of the Covenant, the shock pushed Eli over the edge; Eli dropped backwards and died.

Israel’s armies were slaughtered? The Ark of the LORD was stolen? Didn’t God want His people to win? Didn’t God condemn the wicked idolatries of the Philistines? Did God change? What was different now?

There is something that is startlingly missing from this slice of history. Something is missing that makes all the difference between life and death. It’s not the golden Ark that is missing but the words and promises of God. Through this whole history you will not find the words: “And God said...” or “The LORD told them to...”.

Instead, Israel was rash and arrogant as they took God's Ark. They expected it to be a lucky rabbit's foot. Their actions were far from faith. Their hearts had nothing to do with the true LORD God. Israel's hearts and actions had to do with what they wanted to happen for their plans.

God, I think you got the Bible wrong. It isn't you who created US in YOUR image, but We who created You in OUR image!

Israel did not live the consecrated, humble life of obedience that Abraham, Joseph, Moses and Joshua lived. Instead Israel had two phonies who feasted on the Lord's sacrifices, the two fakirs who manipulated and defiled women who served in the temple, the two dead-beats who presumed to carry the Ark of Glory into battle.

Israel had turned their faith into a smorgasbord. They picked and chose what they wanted to believe. They did not even want the living God's opinion. They wanted God to do things how they felt so they would feel good. They had twisted the LORD into myth and superstition. So, THE Glory Himself left.

Does it still happen that sometimes believers "go into battle" without consulting the Lord? Do some pray their own agendas? Has God at times been a cosmic gumball machine into which His people put some shiny new prayers and turn heaven's doorknobs "just so" and voila! God's will is done? Every time I look at those Old Testament Israelites and bark at their foolishness, I see too much of myself in them. I find myself battling against the same idols in my sinful nature.



Lord, help me to seek Your will. Put me on the solid ground. I don't want to win my victories. I don't want to misuse Your power. I pray Your will done here on earth just like it is in heaven. Abide with me! Do not leave me. Please, let Your glory stay with me. Nothing in my hands I bring; simply to Your cross I cling.

The LORD's Blessings were meant to be the distinguishing mark of the God's Old Testament covenant. Israel promised obedience. But blessing was hard to come by in those days. God had tied His blessing-hands by and large to His people's obedience. And God's people had abandoned God Himself. "Everyone did as he saw fit." (Judges 21:25) Few remembered God's commands. Fewer obeyed. But *God always has a few.*

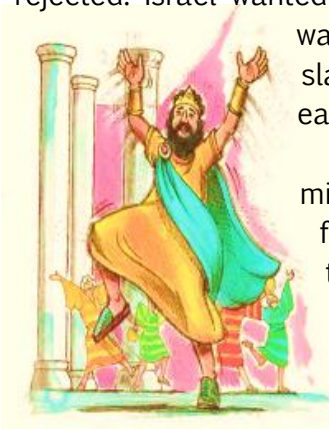
One was a woman named Hannah. She had long endured the grief of childlessness and the taunts of her husband's other wife. On one of her visits to worship at God's house in Shiloh, Hanna poured out her heart in prayer, asking for a son whom she would in turn give back to the LORD.



Eli was the dad of those wicked sons we heard about earlier. He mistook Hannah's devotion for drunkenness. But later, a corrected, humbled Eli assured Hannah her prayer would be heard. And the LORD gave Hannah a son. And Hannah kept her word. She took son Samuel to serve in the tabernacle. Samuel grew up in God's house under Priest Eli.

The LORD spoke to Samuel one night when he was still a boy. God told Samuel that Eli and his sons would be harshly judged. Eli's family would end. God's word came true, this time through the Philistines and that war in which the ARK was taken.

Samuel took Eli's place. But Israel was dissatisfied and wanted a king. Samuel knew better. He expressed his disapproval. But God knew it was God Himself who had been rejected. Israel wanted to be like their pagan neighbors, whom they were *not* to imitate. God warned: a king would be costly; a king would exploit them to the point of slavery. The people ignored God's warnings. They insisted on having an earthly king to follow.



Saul was anointed by Samuel and began well. Saul was affirmed by miraculous signs from God. He fought the Ammonites and gave God credit for the victory. Samuel encouraged the people: God had not rejected them, even though they had turned away from Him. Samuel encouraged them to serve the LORD from the heart. Like a snowstorm in Weslaco, Texas in January or a January sandstorm in sunny Saratoga, Wisconsin, God affirmed Samuel's words with unheard-of thunder and rain, in Middle East, at harvest time. Probably global warming or something...

Sadly, Saul's honeymoon as king was short-lived. During another battle with the Philistines, Saul got nervous. Samuel was not on time according to Saul's clock. So King Saul grabbed his kingly authority and took matters—and offerings—into his own hands. This was a direct rebellion against the LORD who had reserved that activity for the LORD's priests.



Samuel confronted Saul. Saul shifted ground, made excuses, tried to justify his sin. But his royal rebellion wound up losing a dynasty. Then follows a record of Saul's half-hearted obedience.

The king's fear-based leadership faltered month by month and became more twisted with every step. Saul had rejected God, so the LORD said, fine. Have it your way. And God rejected Saul as king.

Saul's reign served to teach that monarchy is no better than anarchy when a man after God's own heart is not on the throne. The politics of the day, back then as well as now, are not what directs the course of His-story. Our LORD rules over our politics, over our heart-life, over our schooling. God claims pre-eminence.

Thankfully, even without the use of our modern poll-taking, the LORD had already chosen His next king. It was an unlikely, ordinary shepherd boy. But the LORD had chosen to bless David as King Saul's successor. And David's throne would endure. He would help point God's people again to the Shepherd King, the LORD's Messiah.



Read *1 Samuel 1-15* **Standing Tall** | **Falling Hard**

1. Sometimes we just want to sit on the fence on an issue. Share a time when you did that. What were the results?



2. What strikes you about Hannah and her faith?

3. What do we learn about prayer from Hannah and Samuel?



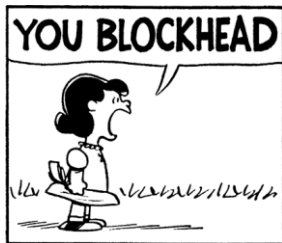
4. Compare the three fathers in the story: Elkanah, Eli and Samuel. What were their best and worst traits?



5. Both Israel and the Philistines treated the Ark like a good-luck charm instead of the sacred presence of God. How do people today try and manipulate God?

6. What's the problem with Israel's politics of wanting a king?

7. Amazingly even after Israel rejects God, the LORD graciously affirms Saul's leadership through miraculous signs. What does this teach about the LORD?



8. Saul started out well but finished poorly. What did Saul need? What advice would you have given Saul?

9. How do you see God revealing His gracious plan to get souls back to Himself today?

Kind Time – Can you list some activities that we could do as a group to help another stick closer to God and His Word?

