

## Ruth Ch 1 Vs 1-5

The book of Ruth is a small book divided up into 4 chapters, each one taking place in a different setting. It's sort of a 4-act drama (some have said), ch 1 taking place in Moab, ch 2 in the fields of Boaz in Bethlehem, ch 3 on the threshing floor of Boaz and Ch 4 at the city gate in Bethlehem. And not only is the book of Ruth one of the most remarkable love stories ever recorded, but it's bursting in "type" and it's a fascinating book of redemption, the book deals with redemption, revival, and restoration. And it stands to show us how the Lord can take something or someone that is completely "wiped out" and turn things so that they're totally "far-out" taking circumstances that were destroying your life and using them to turn you to Him so that He might save your life, and bless your life beyond anything that you might've ever conceived. Why, because we serve a God who is a Restorer, and a Rebuilder, a Reviver, and a Refresher; and so the book of Ruth is a book that ministers hope to those who feel hopeless, declares that God can help the helpless, and shows God's desire to bless those who have been beat down as they turn their eyes upon Him. The book of Ruth is prophetic in it's nature regarding the history of God's dealing with Israel, how the church was brought to Christ on the heels of the Hebrews, how Christ has taken the gentile believers to be His bride and how Israel will once again be blessed of God in the end. So this little book is incredibly rich, and it's a ray of light in an incredibly dark time in the history of the nation of Israel. Because vs 1 of ch 1 reveals to us the approximate time period in which the events of this book took place and it was in the days of the Judges. Now as you know at the end of ch 16 of the book of Judges, the historical portion of the book closes. And what's left in ch's 17-21 are a couple of events that are basically an appendix to the book revealing to us more clearly the time of moral decay and spiritual confusion that was experienced during the period of the judges. There were Levites, who were idolaters, worshipping little trinkets and foreign gods, and these were the spiritual leaders of the nation. And so much spiritual confusion during that time, we saw the radical moral decay last week regarding the tribe of Benjamin and how the men of Gibeah were practicing sodomy, and we saw rape, and murder, revenge, and the reaping taking place of such actions. So extremely dark times as a nation, there was no king ruling over them, and so each person was doing what seemed right in their own eyes. But God always has His remnant; that was one side of what was happening. And over all it was an accurate picture and assessment of the national condition, but you recall when Elijah had killed the prophets of Baal and then Jezebel threatened his life and so he fled to a cave to hide out. And the Lord spoke to him and said what are you doing here? And he started whining about how there was no one else left and how he was going to die and he alone was God's servant, and the Lord basically said Elijah you don't know what you're talking about. And He said, *"I have reserved seven thousand in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him."* And so even in the midst of what we would consider to be some of the darkest times remember that God always has His remnant, those who are faithful to Him.

And He's always moving through those who are open to Him, and here we have another incident that took place during the time of the judges, one that wasn't altogether tragic but rather is more (overall) like a breath of fresh air and a ray of light in these dark times. This 400 yr period of the judges, and in the midst of all the confusion, decay, and declension God was still working out His sovereign plan through the lives of those who were open to Him.

And this is always the case, you can look at the overall condition of a nation and recognize that it's in a horrible mess, much like the United States today, and yet God is always working out His plan in the hearts and lives of those who are open to Him. And so the book of Ruth is a wonderful account of just how God was working out an incredible detail of His plan that pivotal in the bringing forth of His Son in such an incredibly spiritually disoriented time overall. It was during the period of the Judges that we meet Ruth who would become David's great Grandma placing her in the lineage of Christ, when you get to Matthew's gospel of the 5 ladies listed in the lineage Christ, Ruth is one of them, and she wasn't even a Jew. And so another incredible lesson the book of Ruth is the grace of God, and how God isn't willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

Vs1

Now already there are a couple of details that are being revealed to us, and they are significant details that set the stage for not only the remainder of the book, but the overall prophetic picture as well. We've already made the comment on the fact of the timing of this book; it was in the days when the judges ruled. But we see here that this family (who we'll have named in the next vs) resided in Bethlehem, Judah. Now the word "Bethlehem" means "house of bread" which is a significant detail because this is the place where ultimately the Bread of Life Himself, Jesus Christ will be born. And Jesus said that whoever eats of His flesh and drinks of His blood will have life. And that offended His listeners because they couldn't get past the physical, but later He explained to His disciples that the flesh itself profits nothing, and He said it's the word I speak to you that is spirit, and it's life. The word of God is the bread of life to your soul, and it's critical to our spiritual well being that we abide in the house of bread, the word of God. And don't think that it's coincidental that Judah is connected to Bethlehem, because Judah means "praise." and I want you to see the intricate and intimate relationship and correlation between the word of God (the house of bread) and praise. David said in Ps 119:7 "*I will praise You with uprightness of heart, When I learn Your righteous judgments.*" When you learn God's word, you will invariably become God's worshipper. As you learn the ways of God, and the character of God, through the word of God, as you receive God's word, not in your head but in your heart, praise will overflow from your heart to the Lord. Don't miss the connection between Bethlehem, and Judah, the word of God and the praise of God is intimately related one to the other and so if you find yourself having a difficult time really praising the Lord and worshipping the Lord. Not just in the time allotted for corporate worship here, but in your everyday life, if you're distant from Judah, the place of praise. It might be because you're not dwelling in Bethlehem, the House of Bread, the Word of God, because the Word of God, and the worship of God, go hand in hand.

But we read here that there was a famine in the land, a dry time. Now God had told them in advance what would bring famine upon the land and we find in the book of Judges that as Israel would turn their back upon God, that God would turn His back upon them. And he would bring various judgments upon them in order that they might repent, there would at times be captivity and enslavement, pestilence or famines. In Deut 28:15-17 we read, *“it shall come to pass, if you do not obey the voice of the LORD your God, to observe carefully all His commandments and His statutes which I command you today, that all these curses will come upon you and overtake you: Cursed shall you be in the city, and cursed shall you be in the country. Cursed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl.”* and In vs 23-24 we read, *“And your heavens which are over your head shall be bronze, and the earth which is under you shall be iron. The LORD will change the rain of your land to powder and dust; from the heaven it shall come down on you until you are destroyed.”* And so if you’re a society that survives through the means of agriculture this isn’t the news you want to hear.

So not much optimal news to those who choose to walk in disobedience to the Lord, that’s why like Jude said it’s so important that we keep ourselves in the Love of God. Because God will not be mocked, and if you walk out of His will for your life, you remove yourself from the umbrella of His blessing. And that in essence is what we have happening here, it was a time in the period of the judges where the people had sinned against God and so God is keeping His word in shutting up the heavens so that there’s no rain, the result being a famine in the land. Now for you and me we need to understand that there will be dry times in our lives from time to time as well, now at times it can stem from disobedience but other times it may not. Amos talks about a famine of not hearing the word of the Lord, I can relate to that; and if you can’t believe me there will be a time when you can. And maybe that’s where you’re at tonight, it used to be that every time you opened the Word, God spoke to you, or that coming to a study was the highlight of your week. But now there’s a famine in your land, times are dry and difficult, and these seasons come to all of us. And so the question isn’t when these times will come, because they come, the question is where will I go, where will you go when they do? 2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles ch 7 teaches us that the remedy for famine is to stay right where you’re at and call upon the Lord and He will heal your land. But to often we’re like this family, they went to Moab instead, and that my friends is a fundamental mistake, God promised that He would go through the fire with us, but instead we seek to avoid the fire all together, we seek to change our circumstances, and dodge the difficulties. But by leaving the Promised Land this family is just taking a death march, the way that we deal with our problems in life is critical, the bible teaches that we’re to wait upon the Lord to be renewed, but to often we run from the issues which can lead to our destruction. Wiersbe points out that when trouble comes to our lives we can do one of 3 things, endure it, escape it, or enlist it. If all we do is endure, the problem enslaves us which will cause us to become hardened and bitter, if you seek to escape it, you’ll miss the lesson and purpose that God is seeking to teach us and achieve in us. But if we learn to enlist them, then as we learned Sunday morning instead of being a victim of circumstance we become a victor over circumstance and they begin to work for us and not against us. Because we understand that God works all things together for good to those who love God and are the called according to His purpose.

This family should've stayed right where they were at and been apart of the solution, calling upon God that He might heal their land, but instead they went to dwell in the country of Moab. And this word "dwell" or maybe your bible says "sojourn" is a word that means "to dwell temporarily", in other words he wasn't planning on making this endeavor a lengthy stay. He was going to leave the place that he was called to be but it was only for a short season, and often times when things dry up in our lives we respond in much the same way. We decide we're going to take a break from this whole "spirituality" thing, and we tell ourselves that it's only going to be for a short season, but all too often like this family what was meant to be a short journey winds up being yrs of compromise. Because once we've journeyed back into the world we seem to find excuse after excuse for staying there. And like we'll see in this family it's not until we hit rock bottom that we return in repentance, and we'll take note of that in our next gathering.

Vs2

Now this is kind of interesting because "Elimelech" means "my God is King" and Naomi means "pleasantness" or "my delight" and so we have a very interesting family with regards to the names and location of where they lived. "My God is King" and "Pleasantness" lived in the "House of Bread" in "Praise."

So a great little family here, however either things weren't going so well by the time the boys were born, or they weren't doing so well when they were born because their names aren't quite so enviable. As you know in that culture the children were often named with regard to what was happening when they were born or what their character seemed to be, for example when Rebekah had Esau the bible says that he was covered with hair all over when he was born such to the extent that it looked like he was covered with a furry type garment. And so when they saw him they named him "Hairy" Esau means "Hairy" and when Jacob was born right after him he was snatching at Esau's heel, he wanted to be the 1<sup>st</sup> one out, and so they called him Jacob, which means "heel catcher." When Jacobs wife Rachel was having Benjamin she was dying in the birthing process and so she called him Ben-Oni which means "son of my sorrow" but then Jacob changed his name to "son of my right hand" or Benjamin. Now here we have "Mahlon" which means "sickly" and "Chilion" which means, "pining", so these boys weren't exactly the crème of the crop, at least by the meaning of their names. And since they die young it would seem to hold true, can you imagine being called "sickly" or "pining" your whole life? What a drag that would be. But unfortunately Elimelech didn't live like God was his king because when hard times hit, instead of trusting in the Lord and riding out the storm, he immediately headed for higher ground. Now Moab was about 50 miles or so from Bethlehem and it was a fertile ground and so he decided that he would just make a temporary dash over there (sell his land in Bethlehem) and live in Moab until the famine was over or whatever. But listen, your problems are never solved by running from them; you remember what God said there in Duet 28? Cursed you shall be in the city, cursed you shall be in the country, in other words moving geographically doesn't dissolve the ramifications of sin in my life.

It staggers me how many people think that leaving a church will solve their problems, something happens, they get in a tiff or there's a sin issue that they refuse to deal with and instead of repenting or dealing with the situation they just leave and go somewhere else thinking that everything will be better there. Only to find themselves frustrated and discontented because in reality it has nothing to do with location, but it has everything to do with what's going on in my heart. And the bummer about me going somewhere else is that I can't get away from me no matter how hard I try, I always take myself with me and therein lies the problem. Elimelech left the Promised Land, don't miss the significance of that, he left his God given, God ordained place of blessing and journeyed into the world to try and find the remedy for his crisis, or his predicament, his hardship. He was walking by sight and not by faith, just like Abraham did when he fled to Egypt when he encountered a famine, but no matter how difficult our circumstances may be believe when I tell you that they are better dealt with in the arena of God's will for your life rather than seeking refuge in the world. And this family is going to learn that lesson the hard way, the bible tells us that it's in the Lord that we live and we move and we have our being, and we need to trust in Him to provide and take care of us. The 1<sup>st</sup> temptation that Satan laid on Jesus was that of the physical over the spiritual, Jesus was hungry, had been fasting for 40 days and what did Satan do? He tried to get His eyes off the spiritual and onto the physical by appealing to the appetite of His flesh, he said, turn these stones into bread. Use the power of the Spirit to satisfy the drive of the flesh, brothers and sisters there is a deep lesson that lies in that temptation for all who are in the ministry and it's one we don't have time to grab hold of, but the point is, is that he appealed to His flesh, after all you have to live. But again it's in the Lord that we live and we move and we have our being, the lesson being that we're to trust the Lord to meet our needs and not cater to the flesh and trust our own efforts. Because in making this move Elimelech was in reality honoring the enemy and not the Lord, because rather than trusting in the Lord, he's looking to the land of the oppressor, the sustenance of the adversary, the provision of the opponents to take care of him. He journeyed to the country of Moab and remained there, now the Moabites were not the allies of Israel, as a matter of fact in judges ch 3 you find that the Moabites had oppressed Israel for 18 yrs during one of their times of captivity. But the Moabites stemmed down from the man Moab, now for those of you who may not remember Moab was born from the incestuous relationship of Lot's daughters taking advantage of their dad after the destruction of Sodom. And as you read through the account of the destruction of Sodom you find that After Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed, Lot was afraid to stay in the city of Zoar. So he headed up to the mountains and stayed with his two daughters in a cave. And thinking that this was their only chance to continue the family line since they thought the whole world had been destroyed, Lot's daughters got him drunk and conceived children with him. And we read in Gen 19:37 "*The firstborn bore a son and called his name Moab; he is the father of the Moabites to this day.*" And so they had a bad beginning and never really got beyond that, you recall that in the wilderness wanderings that it was the Moabites that hired Balaam to curse the Jews. And when he couldn't do it he said listen, I can't curse them but I can tell you how to get God to curse them, just send your women in among their camp and the men will succumb to their temptations and begin to go into them and worship their god's and that will cause God to curse them. And that's exactly what they did and that's exactly what happened and it resulted in the death of 24,000 Israelites.

So the Moabites were never really on God's good side. In Ps 108 vs 9 God said, Moab is My washpot, or the basin out of which he washes His feet, we might better understand it as Moab is my toilet bowl. So that Elimelech was in essence saying, "You know it's getting pretty tough here in the house of Bread, in the place of praise, the oppression seems to be too much. Let's go take a swim in the toilet bowl for a while just to get away." And it seems absurd but we do the same thing. We're all, "Man it just seems dry right now, my devotions aren't bearing the fruit that they once were, I wonder what's on cable that I can swim around in for a while just to get away for awhile and forget about it all." And off to Moab we go, and it's never meant to be an enduring event, just a little break, but Moab is like a black hole, easy to get sucked in, but radically difficult to get out, what was meant to be a temporary sojourn would turn into 10 yrs of misery and regret.

### Vs3

Interesting, "my God is King" died in Moab, and such is always the case, once I leave Bethlehem Judah, the House of Bread and the place of Praise- the rule and reign of God in my life will begin to evaporate, dissipate, and then die. And what you're left with is sickly and pining at best until eventually there's nothing, everything is dead that you once knew.

### Vs4

And so now Ruth comes into focus, and though the scriptures don't specifically forbid marriage with Moabite women in the Law, it's very clear that they weren't to marry into a people who served foreign gods which in reality was everyone but Israel, and later on in scripture you see rebuke for those who married Moabite women. Both in Solomon's life, and Nehemiah reprimanded the Jews for marrying Moabite women, we read in Deut 23:3-6 *"An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter the congregation of the LORD; even to the tenth generation none of his descendants shall enter the congregation of the LORD forever, because they did not meet you with bread and water on the road when you came out of Egypt, and because they hired against you Balaam the son of Beor from Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse you. Nevertheless the LORD your God would not listen to Balaam, but the LORD your God turned the curse into a blessing for you, because the LORD your God loves you. You shall not seek their peace nor their prosperity all your days forever."* So to say the least this is radical compromise and with out specifically stating not to marry them I'm not sure how you could with out bringing them into the congregation of the Lord and so the spirit of the Law says no, but again don't miss understand the heart of God. He's not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance and so God's grace abounds all throughout the scriptures and such is the case with Ruth. But this compromise turned this temporary sojourn into a 10yr residency and compromise always lengthens our stay in the world. And so it is (Mom's and dad's) that it was the kids that paid the price for the compromise of their parents, mom and dad kicked back, pursued worldly things and so the kids wound up marrying Moabite women who seemed to solidify their compromise rather than godly women from the House of Bread and the place of Praise, because Mom and dad chose the world over the Lord.

Vs5

Interesting, Elimelech took his family in order to escape from death and yet they met death just the same. And after a decade of disobedience all that was left was 3 lonely widows and 3 Jewish graves in a heathen land, all of it pointing back to unbelief and an inability to trust the Lord to carry them. But the stage is set now for this incredible story of redemption and marvelous display of the grace of God in the person of Ruth.