

Uppity Women of the Bible: Ruth

Bible Study Instructions

(Pause your DVD player to read each screen.)

- 1) For best results, read the book of Ruth first! A fun way to do this is as a readers' theatre; assign each person a part (including the narrator), and let your inner drama queen/king shine through. (Go to www.biblenerdproductions.com for a list of parts.)
- 2) Keep a Bible in front of you as you begin. If you are studying with a group, a variety of translations will be helpful, but I primarily use the New Revised Standard Version (The Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., 1989). Look up biblical references as you see them on the screen. Use the pause button freely, if you need time to find a verse or to discuss something.
- 3) Start with "Introducing Biblenerd" (to meet your teacher), and then move through the sessions in order. Each session is 10-15 minutes in length.
- 4) At the end of each segment you will find discussion questions. Discuss them for as much or as little time as you like, using the pause button on your DVD player. Here are a few guidelines for good discussion:
 - Keep a Bible handy as you discuss. Check and re-check the biblical text to answer questions, or even to determine that the Bible cannot answer a particular question. Other helpful reference books include Bible dictionaries, Bible commentaries, Bible atlases and annotated Bibles (rather than devotional Bibles).
 - Everyone should take responsibility for making sure everyone else gets an equal amount of time to talk.
 - Listen to others first; evaluate later. Make sure you understand a comment, then ask questions or pose other options.
 - The better your group knows one another, the better discussions you will have. Start with snacks and end with prayers (or vice versa)!
 - Do not be afraid to ask questions of the Bible, the Bible study, or your other resources! Throughout the centuries, people of faith have struggled with the Bible. You are joining the rich tradition of those spiritual thinkers.
- 4) If you have time remaining in your Bible Study meeting, move on to the next session of *Uppity Women of the Bible: Ruth*. Otherwise, save the remaining sessions for your next gathering.
- 5) I invite your feedback! Send it to biblenerdproductions@gmail.com. Go to www.biblenerdproductions.com for additional resources on Ruth, such as an outline of the book, downloadable study questions, and a trailer of the Ruth Bible study. Keep checking biblenerdproductions.com for newly-released Bible Study resources!

Ruth Outline

- 1) Act I: Naomi and Ruth: an Unlikely Team
 - a) Once Upon a Time 1:1–1:5
 - b) From Moab to Bethlehem; from sweet to bitter 1:6–1:22
 - i) Leaving Moab 1:6-7
 - ii) Naomi sends her daughters/daughters-in-law back 1:8-15
 - iii) Ruth refuses to go; pledges her loyalty 1:16-17
 - iv) Naomi stops speaking to Ruth 1:18
 - v) Arriving in Bethlehem 1:19-21
 - (1) Greeting from the women there 1:19
 - (2) Naomi replies; pledges her bitterness 1:20-21
 - vi) Narrator's summary comment 1:22
- 2) In Boaz's field 2:1–2:23
 - a) Narrator's description of Boaz 2:1
 - b) Ruth goes out to glean; meets Boaz 2:2-17
 - i) Conversation between Ruth and Naomi, Ruth gleans 2:2-3
 - ii) Conversation between Boaz and the reapers, Ruth gleans 2:4-7
 - iii) Conversation between Boaz and Ruth, Ruth eats and gleans abundantly 2:8-17
 - (1) Conversation 2:8-13
 - (2) Abundant eating, thanks to Boaz 2:14
 - (3) Abundant gleaning, thanks to Boaz 2:15-17
 - c) Ruth reports back to Naomi 2:18-22
 - i) [Naomi's hope in YHWH seems to return (2:20)]
 - d) Narrator's summary comment 2:23
- 3) Naomi and Ruth prepare for the future 3:1–3:18
 - a) Naomi instructs Ruth in the strategy 3:1-5
 - b) Ruth and Boaz on the threshing floor 3:6-15
 - c) Ruth reports back to Naomi 3:16-18
- 4) And they lived happily ever after 4:1-22
 - a) Boaz and Ruth live happily ever after 4:1-12
 - i) Boaz takes care of business with the nameless closer next-of-kin 4:1-8
 - (1) (Narrator's explanation of a presumably ancient ritual, that the audience would not have understood anymore 4:6-8)
 - (2) The witnesses respond to Boaz 4:9-12
 - ii) Boaz and Ruth marry and have a son 4:13
 - b) Naomi lives happily ever after 4:14-17
 - i) The women bless Naomi 4:14-15
 - ii) Naomi's son Obed 4:16-17
 - c) Genealogy from Perez to David, through Boaz 4:18-22

Discussion Questions

Session One

What did you learn in this session that was new to you? Did anything surprise or even shock you?

How do the name meanings in Ruth change your understanding of the book?

How might the original audience have heard this story differently than we do today?

What other examples of literature use names that have particular meanings? What is the purpose of this?

What did the ancient Israelites think about the Moabites? Look up Genesis 18:30-38, Numbers 22, and Deuteronomy 23:3-6. Can you find other places in the Bible that illustrate how the people of Israel might have felt about the Moabites?

What did the ancient Israelites think about Bethlehem? Look up 1 Samuel 16:1-13. Can you find other places in the Bible that illustrate how the people of Israel might have felt about Bethlehem?

What ironies can you identify in Chapter 1? What difference do they make to your understanding of the book of Ruth?

Session Two

Learn more about *go'el*! Read Jeremiah 32:6-8, Leviticus 25:25, 48-54, and Numbers 35:19-27, Proverbs 23:11 and Ruth (2:20, 3:9, 12, 13 [four times], 3:4 [five times], 3:6 [four times], 3:7, 8, 14, and 4:1. What do you learn about *go'el* from these passages?

Widows were often categorized along with orphans in the Hebrew Bible as part of society's most vulnerable. See: Exodus 22:22, Deuteronomy 24:19-21, Psalm 146:9, Isaiah 1:17, 4:1, Jeremiah 7:6, Ezekiel 22:7, Malachi 3:5.

Learn more about levirate marriage, ancient Israel's method of protecting widows. Read Deuteronomy 25:5-10 and Genesis 38.

Check my work in re-telling Genesis 38 by doing your own detailed reading of this chapter. Look especially at Genesis 38:14-15, where the text is ambiguous. Did Tamar intend to be taken for a prostitute, or did she just play along with Judah's assumptions? (See Genesis 38)

Learn more about the Hebrew word *hesed*. Look it up everywhere it appears in the book of Ruth: 1:8, 2:20, and 3:10. Look it up some other places in the Hebrew Bible: Exodus 15:13, Judges 1:24, 2 Samuel 16:17, Job 6:14, Psalm 25:10, Psalm 141:5, Proverbs 20:28, Micah 7:20.

Learn more about “feet” as a euphemism for genitals in the Bible! Look up Judges 3:24: Eglon’s servants did not disturb him in his chambers because they assumed he must be “covering his feet.” In 2 Kings 18:27 the people are warned that while under siege they may have to literally “drink the water of their feet.” Deuteronomy 28:57 and Ezekiel 16:24 use “feet” as a euphemism for female genitals.

Who are the people in our society that do not have a “safety net?”

Session Three

Learn more about gleaning: Look up Leviticus 19:9 and 23:22. How does this ancient way of caring for the poor compare to contemporary ways of caring for the poor?

Skim through the book of Ruth and note the places she is referred to as a Moabite (thirteen times!). What do you think the narrator intends in repeating this about her?

Learn more about the meanings of “spread your cloak.” Look up Ezekiel 16:8 and Deuteronomy 22:30. A literal rendering of the latter reads: “A man shall not take the wife of his father, and shall not uncover the wing of his father.” The law prohibited having intercourse with one’s father’s wife. The same Hebrew word for “cloak” means “wing.” See Ruth 2:12.

What point could the author be making by using the same Hebrew word in 2:11 (“wing”) and 3:9 (“cloak”)?

What do you think happened on the threshing floor?

How do you think Naomi and Ruth might have felt about what happened on the threshing floor?

What do you think of Naomi and Ruth for concocting and carrying out the events on the threshing floor?

How do you think an ancient Israelite audience might have reacted to the threshing floor scene?

Session Four

What point(s) do you think the book of Ruth might be making about foreigners?

What role do the women of Bethlehem play in the book of Ruth? (See Ruth 1:19 and 4:14-17). Who plays such a role in contemporary society?

Why would a biblical writer include Perez in the genealogy of David at the end of Ruth? (Ruth 4:18 and Genesis 38:29)

Why would a biblical writer include Ruth in the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew?
(Matthew 1:5)

Who acts as the *go'el* in the book of Ruth? (Go back to Session Two for more information on *go'el*.)

In the book of Ruth, who ended up better off or worse off than they were at the beginning of the story?

Session Five

What kind of literature do you think Ruth is? Has your view on that changed during the course of this study? Why?

Do you think the book of Ruth is funny? Why?

In the Tanakh (the Jewish Bible), Ruth is the first book of the “Five Scrolls,” each of which is read for a festival celebration. After Ruth comes Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations and Esther; they all follow Proverbs. Ruth is read for the festival of Shavuot (also called Pentecost, or the Feast of Weeks), a celebration of the grain harvest and the Torah. How might this context suggest a different understanding of Ruth than the Christian canon, where Ruth follows Judges in the midst of “historical” books?

Discuss how and why different groups of ancient Israelites might have felt about foreigners during the reconstruction period.

How might the book of Ruth have contributed to that debate?

Can you think of some current issues among people of faith that are similar to ancient Israel’s conflict about how to deal with foreigners?

Session Six

Who in today’s world reminds you of the various characters in Ruth? Who in our society do we struggle to welcome?

When was a time that you felt bitter, like Naomi?

Who do you identify with most easily in Ruth? Who is most difficult to identify with, and why?

When have you experienced God’s grace-filled surprises in your life? Have any of those occasions of grace been especially strange?

Ruth as a Readers' Theatre: List of Parts

Use this list of parts to divvy up the book among your class members. Read it as theatrically as you can!

Narrator

Naomi

Orpah

Ruth

Women of Bethlehem

Boaz

Reapers

Head Reaper

Nearer-Next-of-Kin

People of Bethlehem

Elders