

Study Guide for Ruth 1–2

Emphasis: Ruth 1:11–18; Ruth 2:5–12

Ruth takes place “in the days when the judges ruled” (Ruth 1:1). That matters because Judges repeatedly shows spiritual decline, compromise, and everyone doing what was right in his own eyes (Judges 21:25). Ruth gives us a different kind of story from the same era: quiet faithfulness, costly loyalty, providence, kindness, and redemption.

The book begins with famine, death, and emptiness. Naomi loses her husband and both sons in Moab (Ruth 1:3–5). Yet through Ruth’s loyalty and Boaz’s kindness, God begins turning emptiness toward fullness. Ruth is not only a family story; it is part of God’s larger redemptive story that eventually leads to David and, later, to Christ (Ruth 4:17; Matthew 1:5–6, 16).

1. Why does the setting of Ruth matter? (Ruth 1:1–5)

Ruth begins during the time of the judges, when there was famine in the land. Elimelech takes his family from Bethlehem in Judah to Moab, where he dies. Then Naomi’s two sons, Mahlon and Chilion, marry Moabite women, Ruth and Orpah, and they also die (Ruth 1:1–5).

This opening is full of loss: famine, migration, widowhood, childlessness, and uncertainty. Bethlehem means “house of bread,” yet there is no bread. Naomi leaves full but later says, “I went out full, and the LORD has brought me home again empty” (Ruth 1:21).

The setting also matters because Moab had a complicated history with Israel. Moabites had opposed Israel in the wilderness, and Deuteronomy 23:3 placed serious restrictions on Moabites entering the assembly of the Lord. Yet Ruth, a Moabite woman, becomes one of the clearest examples of faith and loyal love in the Old Testament.

Forward Connection to Christ: Matthew includes Ruth in the genealogy of Jesus (Matthew 1:5). This shows that God’s redemptive plan reaches beyond Israel by birth and includes outsiders who come under His covenant mercy.

Everyday Application: God often begins His deepest work in seasons that feel empty, displaced, or confusing. Ruth reminds us that loss is not the same as the end of the story.

2. What does Naomi’s urging reveal about the cost facing Ruth and Orpah? (Ruth 1:8–13)

Naomi urges Ruth and Orpah to return to their mothers’ houses. She prays that the Lord will deal kindly with them because they had dealt kindly with the dead and with her (Ruth 1:8). Naomi knows she cannot provide them husbands, security, or a future in any ordinary sense.

In Ruth 1:11–13, Naomi explains the impossibility of her situation. She has no more sons to offer, and even if she could bear sons that night, Ruth and Orpah could not wait for them to grow. Naomi’s words show real grief and realism. Following her back to Judah will not be easy or obviously beneficial.

Forward Connection to Christ: Jesus also tells people to count the cost before following Him (Luke 14:27–33). Faithful love is not shallow sentiment; it is costly commitment.

Everyday Application: Love sometimes requires honesty about cost. Naomi does not manipulate Ruth and Orpah. She lets them see the difficulty clearly. True commitment is strongest when it is made with open eyes.

3. What is the difference between Orpah’s departure and Ruth’s clinging? (Ruth 1:14)

Ruth 1:14 says Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her. Orpah’s departure is not described harshly. She weeps, loves Naomi, and returns home as Naomi urged her to do. But Ruth goes further. She clings.

That word matters. Ruth’s loyalty is not merely emotional affection. She binds herself to Naomi’s future, even though that future appears uncertain and costly. Her love is steadfast, not convenient.

This kind of loyalty reflects the biblical idea of covenant kindness, often called **hesed** — faithful, committed love. Naomi used this idea when she prayed that the Lord would deal kindly with Ruth and Orpah (Ruth 1:8).

Forward Connection to Christ: Jesus shows the fullness of steadfast love. John says Jesus loved His own “to the end” (John 13:1). Ruth’s loyalty gives us a small picture of love that does not abandon the needy.

Everyday Application: Faithful love is revealed not only by what we feel, but by what we cling to when leaving would be easier.

4. What makes Ruth’s words in Ruth 1:16–17 so powerful? (Ruth 1:16–17)

Ruth says:

“Entreat me not to leave you,
Or to turn back from following after you;
For wherever you go, I will go;
And wherever you lodge, I will lodge;
Your people shall be my people,
And your God, my God.
Where you die, I will die,
And there will I be buried.
The LORD do so to me, and more also,
If anything but death parts you and me.”

— **Ruth 1:16–17 NKJV**

This is more than affection for Naomi. Ruth is leaving land, family, future prospects, and Moab’s gods. She identifies herself with Naomi’s people and Naomi’s God. Her commitment is relational, spiritual, and permanent.

Ruth's words echo the kind of decisive allegiance Joshua called for when he said, "Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve" (Joshua 24:15). Ruth chooses the Lord, even though she comes from outside Israel.

Forward Connection to Christ: Jesus calls for allegiance above all other loyalties: "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me" (Matthew 10:37). Ruth's words show a heart willing to reorder life around the true God.

Everyday Application: Real faith is not simply adding God to our existing life. It means a new belonging, a new people, a new direction, and a new Lord.

5. Why is Naomi's return to Bethlehem both bitter and hopeful? (Ruth 1:19–22)

When Naomi returns to Bethlehem, the city is stirred. Naomi says not to call her Naomi, which means pleasant, but Mara, meaning bitter, because "the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me" (Ruth 1:20). She feels empty and afflicted.

Naomi's grief is honest. Scripture does not rush past her pain. Yet the narrator gives a quiet note of hope: they came to Bethlehem "at the beginning of barley harvest" (Ruth 1:22). Naomi feels empty, but harvest is beginning. God is already setting the stage for provision.

Forward Connection to Christ: In the Gospels, Jesus meets grieving people with compassion. He weeps at Lazarus's tomb (John 11:35), yet He also brings life where death seemed final (John 11:43–44).

Everyday Application: Faith does not require pretending bitterness is not real. But Ruth reminds us that God may already be preparing mercy before we can see it.

6. What does Ruth's gleaning show about humility and provision? (Ruth 2:1–7)

Ruth goes to glean in the fields, saying, "Please let me go to the field, and glean heads of grain after him in whose sight I may find favor" (Ruth 2:2). This was provided for in God's law. Landowners were not to reap the corners of their fields or gather every leftover, but were to leave some for the poor, stranger, fatherless, and widow (Leviticus 19:9–10; Deuteronomy 24:19).

Ruth does not sit passively. She acts humbly and diligently. She is a widow, foreigner, and poor woman, but she works within the provision God had built into Israel's law.

The narrator says she "happened to come" to the part of the field belonging to Boaz (Ruth 2:3). From Ruth's perspective, it may seem accidental. From the larger story, we begin to see God's providence.

Forward Connection to Christ: Jesus teaches His followers to trust the Father's provision while still living faithfully: "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (Matthew 6:33).

Everyday Application: God's provision often comes through ordinary obedience, humble work, and unseen providence. What looks like coincidence may be God quietly guiding the story.

7. What does Boaz notice about Ruth, and what does that teach us about character? (Ruth 2:5–7)

Boaz asks, “Whose young woman is this?” (Ruth 2:5). The servant identifies Ruth as the Moabite woman who returned with Naomi and explains that she asked permission to glean and had continued working from morning until then (Ruth 2:6–7).

Ruth is noticed not through self-promotion, but through faithfulness. She is humble enough to ask, diligent enough to work, and loyal enough to provide for Naomi. Her reputation has already begun to speak.

This matters because Ruth had made a covenant-like commitment in Ruth 1:16–17, and now that commitment is being lived out in ordinary labor.

Forward Connection to Christ: Jesus says, “He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much” (Luke 16:10). Ruth’s faithfulness in a field becomes part of God’s larger work of redemption.

Everyday Application: Character is often revealed in ordinary places: how we work, how we serve, how we care for others, and how we act when no one important seems to be watching.

8. How does Boaz’s blessing reveal God’s care for Ruth? (Ruth 2:8–12)

Boaz speaks kindly to Ruth, telling her not to glean in another field, to stay close to his young women, and to drink from the water drawn by his servants (Ruth 2:8–9). Ruth is amazed and asks why she has found favor, since she is a foreigner (Ruth 2:10).

Boaz answers that he has been told all she has done for Naomi after her husband’s death, and how she left her father, mother, and homeland to come to a people she did not know before (Ruth 2:11). Then he blesses her:

“The LORD repay your work, and a full reward be given you by the LORD God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge.”

— **Ruth 2:12 NKJV**

That phrase “under whose wings” is beautiful. Ruth has come under the refuge of Israel’s God. Boaz becomes one of the ways God’s refuge is made tangible to her.

Forward Connection to Christ: Jesus uses similar language when He grieves over Jerusalem: “How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings” (Matthew 23:37). In Christ, God’s refuge is offered fully and personally.

Everyday Application: God often shows His care through people who see, protect, and bless others. We can be like Ruth, seeking refuge in the Lord; and we can be like Boaz, making God’s kindness visible to someone vulnerable.