

and we magnify his strictness
with a zeal he will not own.'

When I thought about the sense of the passage showing us how the characters we have been looking at connect to Christ, I talked about it as my own happy ever after in the story. It brought to mind Samuel Medley's hymn 'I know that my redeemer lives' (StF502) which says:

'I know that my redeemer lives –
What joy the blest assurance give!
He lives, he lives who once was dead;
He lives, my everlasting head,
He lives, my everlasting head.'

One of the things I like about the 'Singing the faith' book is that it brings in music and hymns from the world-wide church. 411 begins with a traditional Spanish blessing that speaks of both resilience and redemption, themes we find in Ruth and which connect with the theme of acceptance. As we end our studies on Ruth then, may we find the blessing the hymn speaks of:

'May the God of hope go with us every day,
filling all our lives with love and joy and peace.
May the God of justice speed us on our way,
bringing light and hope to every land and race.

Closing Prayer

Loving God, we give thanks that you are with us through good times and bad. We celebrate that in the story of Ruth we that glimpse of the joy of the root of Jesse, the promise of Christ with us. We pray especially at this time for all those who find themselves in difficult situations, particularly those who have faced or are facing huge loss. Help us to offer support, generosity, companionship and care to all who are suffering, particularly those known to us at this time. These prayers we offer in and through the name of Christ. Amen.

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Bible Month Bible Study – Ruth 4

To start our thinking

It's the last week of Bible Month already! How have you found the book of Ruth up to now? What have you found the most helpful? What has been more difficult? You may like to jot down your thoughts as we prepare to look at the next Chapter.

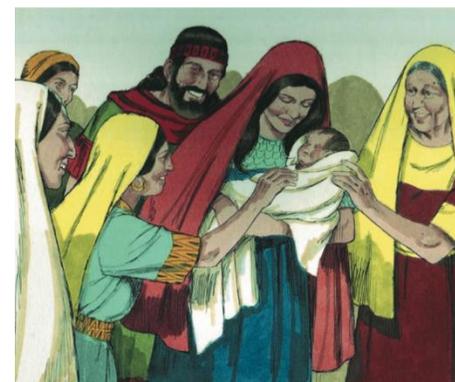
A prayer

Loving God, once again, as I come to think more about the book of Ruth on my own and yet also alongside others I pray, open my heart to your word and your word to my heart. Amen.

Introducing Week 4 – the story of Ruth

Written by the circuit planning group, based on the Bible month booklet

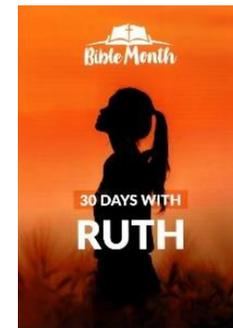
Picture from the Bible Month booklet



How do you like stories to end? The close relative did not want to pursue his claim, so Boaz married Ruth and they had a son, Obed. Naomi helped to care for the child and the book ends by telling us that Obed was father to Jesse, who was father to David. This is the family line which leads eventually to Jesus.

Today's Reading – Ruth Chapter 4

As with the previous week, you might find it helpful to read this in a couple of different versions of the Bible if you have access to them. Contact Lorna if you have no Bible and she will get a copy of the readings to you.



Opening Questions from Lorna

Our opening questions will be the same each time and are there to help us see what we noticed about the text we read.

- What words or phrases stood out to you most from the passage you have just read?
- Was there anything new or surprising?
- Anything you found difficult?
- Are there any themes emerging?

You may like to read the passage again at this point and see if there is anything else you want to note.

A brief reflection from Lorna on the passage

There is a sense in which this Chapter is the old cliché of ‘they all lived happily ever after’. Yet we have seen throughout Ruth and continuing into this chapter how hard won this ultimate happiness is.

Chapter 4 begins with the unnamed guardian-redeemer of the previous chapter being met at the gate by Boaz. Reading this passage as a woman was difficult for me, particularly the way Ruth is talked about as property and particularly when the field is wanted, but she is not! Charming!

I was a bit surprised then to read in the notes for Bible Month that in the laws of the time it actually wasn't the case that Ruth came with the field. It isn't clear if Boaz knows this or not so we can't be sure if he is trying to put the other person off or just misunderstanding the law. However, the end result is that Boaz does indeed buy the field and marry Ruth.

Then they have a son and there is a sense that this is a coming full circle for Ruth and Naomi too. It is a move from their time to loss to a time of joy. I have to say, I wonder with Rachel Starr about whether the loss that they experienced in the early part of the story is so easily overcome. Perhaps then we should not so readily apply the idea of happy ever after. Instead, I found myself reflecting whether this speaks to what I so often find when I read Psalm 23. That life has both dark valleys and green pastures, both shadows and still waters. Both joys and sorrows.

Yet in all of these things, God goes with us. For me, that is most clearly seen in the final few verses when we learn that the son of Ruth and Boaz is called Obed and that Obed will become a father to Jesse and Jesse a father to David. This is the same genealogy then that Christ himself will be connected to. The root of Jesse, Christ with us is here in this story of Ruth. For me, that really is a ‘happy ever after’.

Further Questions based on this passage

- What did you notice about the character of Naomi in this story?
- In the notes for Bible month, Rachel Starr reflects that loss may not be easily overcome. What are your experiences of loss? In what ways, if any have they changed over time?
- There is a real sense of acceptance for both Ruth and Naomi in this final chapter in the way people respond to the birth of Obed. What does acceptance mean to you? Have you had times when you have or haven't felt accepted? How does that make you respond to others?
- What is your response to learning that this family is connected to the family of Christ? What does being part of Christ's family mean to you?

Hymns and Songs that help us reflect

From the Circuit music for Ruth resource, collated by Peter Clarkson

I am particularly fond of the hymn by Frederick William Faber ‘There's a wideness in God's mercy’ (StF 416). It reminds us of our fallibility when it comes to responding to others and we see in Ruth just what a difficult time she and Naomi have because of societal structures. My favourite verse reminds me that the love of God is greater than our human constructs and expectations:

‘But we make his love too narrow
by false limits of our own;