

Study Guide for Ruth

Welcome to this study of the book of Ruth! As you come to this study, I encourage you to remember to begin and end each session with prayer, asking the Holy Spirit to open your mind and heart to the messages God has given his people in this book. These are God's holy words to us and we can't understand them properly without His guidance. My prayer as I write this study is that it will bless you by helping you to grow in your ability to study the bible on our own and helping you to know our great and awesome God better.

As you work through this study the guide will lead you through the three main steps of inductive bible study: observation, interpretation, and application. My study method has been heavily influenced by Jen Wilkin's *Women of the Word* and I highly recommend her book if you'd like to learn more about the ins and outs of inductive bible study. I'll be setting this study up to be worked through in four sessions, one chapter in each session. We worked through the background information for Ruth at our retreat, but if you missed the retreat you should start by looking up 1) who wrote the book, 2) when it was written, 3) to whom it was written, 4) in what style/genre it was written, 5) why it was written, and 6) where it fits in the whole story of the bible (biblical narrative). This information can be found in a study bible, commentary on Ruth, or blueletterbible.com (which also has some good free online commentaries).

Once your background information is complete, get yourself a copy of the text in the translation you are most comfortable with that you can mark up, whether digital through a bible app with note taking capabilities or a printed copy. Jen Wilkin recommends printing off a copy that is double spaced with wide margins to give lots of room for note taking. If working on a shorter book like Ruth I personally like to write it out double spaced by hand, but it is rather time consuming (I've only started doing this post baby/toddler stage) so do what works best for you.

Begin by reading through the whole book a few times. This will help you become familiar with the text and keep the whole story in view as you work through the individual chapters. If you will be working through this study with a group, I recommend reading through the book a few times between each time you meet to keep yourself grounded in the story as a whole.

Chapter 1

Observation: What does it say?

- Read through the chapter a few times. Note repeated words and phrases, lists, connecting words, words you don't know/can't define easily, questions that the text brings to mind, attributes of God mentioned, and anything else that seems important or relevant to understanding the story.
- Grab a dictionary and look up any words you noticed that you wanted to look up. The words I looked up (working from the ESV) were *sojourn* (v1), *bitter* (v13), *determined* (v18), and *stirred* (v19).
- Read through the chapter in a few different translations. Note where the translator used different wording and check to see if it helps you understand the passage better.
- As Ruth is a story or narrative, note where the story takes place (setting), the main characters introduced in this section, and the problem that is identified.

Interpretation: What does it mean?

- Look up the cross references for the chapter. If working through this chapter as a group, split up the work and have each member look up a few and share any they feel aid their understanding of what the text means. The cross references I found most helpful were from v2 (Micah 5:2), v6 (Exodus 4:31, Luke 1:68), v17 (1 Samuel 3:17, 2 Samuel 19:13), v20 (Exodus 15:23).
- If anything in the passage has made you think of a theme or story somewhere else in scripture that didn't show up in the cross references, look it up now. Connections between passages are almost never accidental and these connections can be a big help in figuring out what the passage means. In this passage I found looking into Bethlehem helpful. You can use tools such as a concordance or stepbible.com to look up all the places a word occurs throughout the bible.
- Think about the repeated words or phrases that you noted in observation. What themes or ideas does the author seem to be emphasizing?
- Look for verses throughout the passage that develop the themes we discussed at the retreat: kindness, God's sovereignty, redemption, and inclusion of the Gentiles. How do these verses relate to and build on these themes?
- What attributes of God are displayed in this chapter? See the last page for a list of some of God's attributes.
- Once you have done the work of trying to interpret for yourself, consult the notes in your study bible and any commentaries you have access to (some older ones are available for free online or Tim Challies has a great list of commentaries if you're looking to buy your own).

Application: How should it change me?

- Jen Wilkin's three questions to work through to get to application are: what does this passage teach me about God? How does this aspect of God's character change my view of self? What should I do in response?
- In chapter one Naomi faces a seemingly constant stream of tragedies from famine, to the loss of her husband, to the loss of her sons. Who is the cause of these trials in her view? Are you sometimes tempted to view good things in your life as from the Lord and hard things as from Satan? How does this display a lack of understanding of God's character? How can this make trials harder to bear?
- Here we see Ruth forsake her god, Chemosh (god of the Moabites) and pledge allegiance to the God of Israel (v 16). How does the Lord feel about foreigners joining his people? Is the inclusion of the Gentiles merely a post-cross change of plans or was God's heart always for all the nations? See Genesis 12:1-3, Psalm 22:27, Isaiah 56:6-8.

Chapter 2

Observation: What does it say?

- Read through the chapter a few times. Note repeated words and phrases, lists, connecting words, words you don't know/can't define easily, questions that the text brings to mind, attributes of God mentioned, and anything else that seems important or relevant to understanding the story.
- Grab a dictionary and look up any words you noticed that you wanted to look up. The words I looked up (working from the ESV) were *reproach* (v15), *forsake* and *redeem* (v20).
- Read through the chapter in a few different translations. Note where the translator used different wording and check to see if it helps you understand the passage better.

- Again make note of where this chapter is set. Who are the major characters here? What events are impacting the problem identified in chapter one? Did any new problems arise?

Interpretation: What does it mean?

- Look up the cross references for the chapter. If working through this chapter as a group, split up the work and have each member look up a few and share any they feel aid their understanding of what the text means. The cross references I found most helpful were from v 2 (Exodus 24:19-22), v 10 (1 Samuel 25:23, 41).
- If anything in the passage has made you think of a theme or story somewhere else in scripture that didn't show up in the cross references, look it up now. Connections between passages are almost never accidental and these connections can be a big help in figuring out what the passage means. In this passage I found it helpful to look into the gleaning laws in Deuteronomy 24 and the laws for redemption of land in Leviticus 25.
- Think about the repeated words or phrases that you noted in observation. What themes or ideas does the author seem to be emphasizing?
- Look for verses throughout the passage that develop the themes we discussed at the retreat: kindness, God's sovereignty, redemption, and inclusion of the Gentiles. How do these verses relate to and build on these themes?
- What attributes of God are displayed in this chapter? See the last page for a list of some of God's attributes.
- Once you have done the work of trying to interpret for yourself, consult the notes in your study bible and any commentaries you have access to (some older ones are available for free online or Tim Challies has a great list of commentaries if you're looking to buy your own).

Application: How should it change me?

- Jen Wilkin's three questions to work through to get to application are: what does this passage teach me about God? How does this aspect of God's character change my view of self? What should I do in response?
- What do we learn about the character of both Ruth and Boaz in this chapter? How do or don't these character traits reflect God's character? Are there areas of strong character they display in an area where you struggle? How might you improve in that area?
- Look at the law for gleaning the fields in Leviticus 19:9-10 and Deuteronomy 24:19-22. What does this teach us about God's heart for the poor and oppressed? How should we respond to the poor and oppressed in light of this.

Chapter 3

Observation: What does it say?

- Read through the chapter a few times. Note repeated words and phrases, lists, connecting words, words you don't know/can't define easily, questions that the text brings to mind, attributes of God mentioned, and anything else that seems important or relevant to understanding the story.
- Grab a dictionary and look up any words you noticed that you wanted to look up. The words I looked up (working from the ESV) were *winnow* (v2) and *worthy* (v11).
- Read through the chapter in a few different translations. Note where the translator used different wording and check to see if it helps you understand the passage better.

- As Ruth is a story or narrative, note where the story takes place (setting), the main characters introduced in this section, and the problem that is identified.

Interpretation: What does it mean?

- Look up the cross references for the chapter. If working through this chapter as a group, split up the work and have each member look up a few and share any they feel aid their understanding of what the text means. The cross references I found most helpful were from v 9 (Ezekiel 16:8) and v 13 (Deuteronomy 25:5-10).
- If anything in the passage has made you think of a theme or story somewhere else in scripture that didn't show up in the cross references, look it up now. Connections between passages are almost never accidental and these connections can be a big help in figuring out what the passage means. Here I studied the law of levirate marriage by looking at Genesis 38 and Deuteronomy 25:5-10.
- Think about the repeated words or phrases that you noted in observation. What themes or ideas does the author seem to be emphasizing?
- Look for verses throughout the passage that develop the themes we discussed at the retreat: kindness, God's sovereignty, redemption, and inclusion of the Gentiles. How do these verses relate to and build on these themes?
- What attributes of God are displayed in this chapter? See the last page for a list of some of God's attributes.
- Once you have done the work of trying to interpret for yourself, consult the notes in your study bible and any commentaries you have access to (some older ones are available for free online or Tim Challies has a great list of commentaries if you're looking to buy your own).

Application: How should it change me?

- Jen Wilkin's three questions to work through to get to application are: what does this passage teach me about God? How does this aspect of God's character change my view of self? What should I do in response?
- The theme of kindness is so evident in this chapter. How is kindness displayed by Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz here? Is God's kindness visible, even if not plainly stated? How can this encourage us to be kind to others?

Chapter 4

Observation: What does it say?

- Read through the chapter a few times. Note repeated words and phrases, lists, connecting words, words you don't know/can't define easily, questions that the text brings to mind, attributes of God mentioned, and anything else that seems important or relevant to understanding the story.
- Grab a dictionary and look up any words you noticed that you wanted to look up. The words I looked up (working from the ESV) were *perpetuate* (v5) and *attest* (v7).
- Read through the chapter in a few different translations. Note where the translator used different wording and check to see if it helps you understand the passage better.

- One last time examine the setting of this chapter. What characters are present? What resolution to the main problem do we see?

Interpretation: What does it mean?

- Look up the cross references for the chapter. If working through this chapter as a group, split up the work and have each member look up a few and share any they feel aid their understanding of what the text means. The cross references I found most helpful were from v4 (Leviticus 25:25-28), v5 (Deuteronomy 25:5-6), v7 (Deuteronomy 25:7-10), v12 (Genesis 38:29), and v17 (Luke 1:59).
- If anything in the passage has made you think of a theme or story somewhere else in scripture that didn't show up in the cross references, look it up now. Connections between passages are almost never accidental and these connections can be a big help in figuring out what the passage means. In this passage I looked at the story of Perez's birth and how the story of Judah and Tamar compares and contrasts with the story of Ruth and Boaz.
- Think about the repeated words or phrases that you noted in observation. What themes or ideas does the author seem to be emphasizing?
- Look for verses throughout the passage that develop the themes we discussed at the retreat: kindness, God's sovereignty, redemption, and inclusion of the Gentiles. How do these verses relate to and build on these themes?
- What attributes of God are displayed in this chapter? See the last page for a list of some of God's attributes.
- Once you have done the work of trying to interpret for yourself, consult the notes in your study bible and any commentaries you have access to (some older ones are available for free online or Tim Challies has a great list of commentaries if you're looking to buy your own).

Application: How should it change me?

- Jen Wilkin's three questions to work through to get to application are: what does this passage teach me about God? How does this aspect of God's character change my view of self? What should I do in response?
- Now, in the climax of this story we see the theme of redemption fully fleshed out. What is redeemed for Ruth? For Naomi? What future redemption is being pointed to by the genealogy at the end of the chapter? Take a moment to ponder the longing the original hearers and readers must have felt for this future redemption. How blessed are we to live as redeemed people today! What an amazing God we serve! How does knowledge that you have been redeemed change your day to day life?