



Ruth

Video Transcript

Introduction

00:00-00:28

The book of Ruth. It's a brilliant work of theological art, and it invites us to reflect on the question of how God is involved in the day-to-day joys and hardships of our lives. There are three main characters in the book: Naomi, the widow; Ruth, the Moabite; and Boaz, the Israelite farmer. And their story is told in four chapters that are beautifully designed. Let's just dive in and see how this all unfolds.

Chapter 1

00:29-01:42

Chapter 1 opens with this line, "In the days when the judges ruled." And it reminds us of the very dark and difficult days from the book of Judges. And here, we meet an Israelite family in Bethlehem, struggling to survive through a famine. And so in search of food, they move on to the land of Moab, Israel's ancient enemy. And there the father of the family dies, and the sons marry two Moabite women, Ruth and Orpah. And then the sons, they die too, and so they leave only Naomi and these new daughters-in-law.

And so Naomi, she has no reason to stay anymore, and so she tells her new daughters-in-law that she is moving back home. And Naomi, she knows that the life of an unmarried foreign widow in Israel is going to be very hard, and so she compels the women to stay behind. Orpah agrees, but Ruth does not. She shows remarkable loyalty to Naomi, and she says, "Wherever you go, I'm going to go. Your people will become my people, and your God will become my God." And so the two of them return to Israel together, and the chapter concludes with Naomi changing her name to Mara, which means "bitter" in Hebrew, and she laments her tragic fate.

Chapter 2

01:43-03:02

Chapter 2 begins with Naomi and Ruth discussing where they're going to find food, and it just so happens to be the beginning of the barley harvest. And so Ruth goes out to look for food, and it just so happens that she ends up picking grain in the field of a man named Boaz, who just so happens to be Naomi's relative.

We're told that Boaz is a man of noble character, and he notices Ruth. And so after finding out more about her story, he shows remarkable generosity to her. He makes these special provisions so that the immigrant, Ruth, can gather grain in his field. And in doing so, Boaz is actually obeying an explicit command of the Torah to show generosity to the immigrant and the poor. Boaz is so impressed by Ruth's loyalty to Naomi, he prays for her that God will reward her for her boldness.

So Ruth comes home that day, and Naomi finds out that she met Boaz, and she is thrilled. She says Boaz is their "family redeemer." Now, this family redeemer thing, this was a cultural practice in Israel where, if a man in the family died, and he left behind a wife or children or land, it was the family redeemer's responsibility to marry that widow, to take up the land, and protect that family. So Naomi, she begins to hope that perhaps there might still be a future for her family.

Chapter 3

03:02-03:55

Chapter 3 begins with Naomi and Ruth making a plan to get Boaz to notice their situation. So Ruth is going to stop wearing clothes of a grieving widow, and she's going to show signs that she's available to be married. And so Ruth goes to meet Boaz on the farm that night, and as she approaches, Boaz wakes up, and he's totally startled. And Ruth makes her intentions very clear: She asks if Boaz will redeem Naomi's family and marry her.

Boaz is once again amazed by Ruth's loyalty to Naomi and her family, and he calls Ruth "a woman of noble character." It's the same term used to describe the woman of Proverbs 31. So Boaz tells Ruth to wait until the next day, and he will redeem both Ruth and Naomi legally before the town elders. And so the chapter ends with Ruth returning to Naomi, and they marvel together at all of these recent events.

Chapter 4

03:56-06:17

In chapter 4, it all comes together. It turns out, at the last minute, Boaz discovers there is a family member who's closer to Naomi than he is, and he's actually eligible before him to redeem the family. But at the last second, this family member finds out that he's going to have to marry Ruth, the Moabite, and so he declines.

But Boaz, remember, he knows Ruth's true character. And so he acquires the family property of Naomi, and he marries Ruth. And so just at the beginning, how Ruth was loyal to Naomi's family, so now Boaz is loyal to Naomi's family as well.

The story concludes with a reversal of all of the tragedies from chapter 1. So the death of the husband and the sons is reversed as Ruth is married again and gives birth to a new son, granting joy to Naomi. And this symmetry between the opening and the closing, it's even more remarkable.

So remember, the opening tragedy was followed by a great act of loyalty on the part of Ruth. And that is now matched by Boaz' act of loyalty that leads to the family's final restoration. And this symmetry, it highlights the design of the internal chapters as well. So each of the chapters begins with Naomi and Ruth making a plan for their future, and that's followed by a providential meeting between Ruth and Boaz, and each chapter concludes with Naomi and Ruth rejoicing at what's taken place.

This story is beautifully designed, and that design actually connects with a really interesting feature of the story, and that's how little God is mentioned. The characters talk about God a few times, but the narrator actually never once mentions God doing anything directly in the story, and that's its brilliance. Because God's providence is at work behind every scene of this story, weaving together the circumstances and choices of all these characters.

So Naomi, her tragedy leads her to think that God is punishing her, but actually the whole story is about God's mission to restore her and her family. And he's doing so through Ruth, through her boldness and loyalty, which brings healing to Naomi's life. But not without Boaz, who's a no-nonsense farmer, who's full of generosity and loyalty. And so God uses his integrity, combined with Ruth's boldness, to save Naomi and her family.

Conclusion

06:18-07:11

And so this story brilliantly explores the interplay of God's purposes and will with human decision and will. God weaves together the faithful obedience of his people to bring about his redemptive purposes in the world, and that leads to the real end of the story. The book of Ruth concludes with the genealogy, showing how Boaz and Ruth's son, Obed, was the grandfather of King David, from whom came the lineage of the Messiah.

And so all of a sudden, these seemingly mundane ordinary events in this story are woven into God's grand story of redemption for the whole world. And so the book of Ruth invites us to consider how God might be at work in the very ordinary, mundane details of our lives as well. And that's what the book of Ruth is all about.