

90 Days in
Ruth, Jeremiah
&
I Corinthians

EXPLORE BY THE BOOK
Ruth, Jeremiah & 1 Corinthians

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EXPLORE

BY THE BOOK

90 DAYS IN

Ruth, Jeremiah
&
I Corinthians

— with —

Mark Dever
& Mike McKinley

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Introduction

“The words of the LORD are flawless, like silver purified in a crucible, like gold refined seven times.”

(Psalm 12 v 6)

This book is not an end in itself. It is a means of accessing the treasures of a far greater book. Its words are valuable only to the extent that they help you to enjoy the infinite value of words that are perfectly true, gloriously beautiful, and utterly wonderful—the words of the LORD.

It is a magnificent thing, in a world which is used to mistakes, to deceit, and to confusion, to be able to read flawless, pure, refined words. And that is what you do each time you open your Bible. God does not make errors in anything he says. He does not obscure the truth, by accident or by design. He does not fail to do anything he has said he will do.

That is why this devotional is an “open Bible devotional”—that is, you will need to keep your Bible open, on your lap or on your screen, as you use these studies. You’ll be asked questions that bring you to examine and think hard about the text. The aim of the authors is to cause you to spend more time thinking about God’s words than their words.

So, rather than seeing these devotionals as snacks, view them as meals. Set aside half an hour in your day to work through the study, and to respond to what you have seen. They are best done daily—but the most crucial thing is for you to find a pattern that is sustainable—better five studies a week for life, than seven studies a week for only a week!

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Further, since every word of the Lord is flawless, we need to read every word in the Scriptures, rather than sticking to our favorite passages, or to an author's favorites. So *Explore by the Book* works, verse by verse, through whole books or large sections of the Bible. You will be moving through both famous books and not-so-popular ones, and within each book through much-used passages and less traveled parts. Expect to discover new favorite passages and memory verses that you had never read or noticed or appreciated before!

At the same time, God's word is not always easy to understand. Whether we are completely new to reading it, or have mined its riches many times, all of us still experience "huh?" moments as we struggle to grasp its meaning! So in this devotional series, some of the greatest Bible teachers in the evangelical world help you to dig up the Bible's treasures, and explain their more opaque aspects. They will show you how what you are reading fits into the great overall story of the Scriptures, and prompt you to apply what you have read to your life.

God's word is not simply pure—it is also purifying. It is the way his Spirit works in his people to challenge and change us. It is designed to move us to worship him with our lips, in our hearts, and through our lives. Each day, you will see one (or both) of these headings: *Apply*, and *Pray*. Use these sections to turn what you have read in God's word into words to speak back to God, and into ways you will change your life in response to God.

At the end of each study you'll find a journaling page, for you to record your response to what you have read, either in words or in drawings. Use these pages as you are led to—we all have different ways of making sure we remember what we have seen in the Scriptures, and of responding to those Scriptures. But here are a couple of very straightforward suggestions that you might like to try:

Before you work through the study, read the passage and record...

The Highlight: the truth about God that has most struck you.

The Query: the questions you have about what you have read (and your best attempt at answering them)

The Change: the major way you feel the Spirit is prompting you to change either your attitudes, or your actions, as a result of what you have read.

After you have done the study, record:

One sentence summing up how God has spoken to you through his word.

A short prayer in response to what you have seen.

INTRODUCTION

I hope you enjoy these 90 days listening to the flawless words of the LORD. Be sure that they will excite, change, challenge and comfort you. Be praying that God would be using his word to bless you. There is literally nothing like the words of the LORD.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Carl Laferton', with a long, sweeping flourish extending to the right.

Carl Laferton, Editorial Director
The Good Book Company

Note: This devotional is based on the NIV2011 Bible translation, but it will also work well with either ESV or NIV1984 translations.

Meet the Authors



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A Family Disaster

Ruth I v 1-5

Ruth opens in “the days when the judges ruled,” and, it seems from the end of the book, that the events described here took place around 1100 BC.

The period of the judges was marked by the lack of a king and general disobedience to the law of the LORD (Judges 21 v 25), but Ruth’s story is going to show us how God used the courage of two women to give Israel the king that they needed.

The Family Tree

Read Ruth I v 1-5

The story of this family is complicated.

Can you sketch out a “family tree” (in your head or on paper) establishing these people’s relationships to each other?

- *Elimelek (meaning “God is king”)*
- *Naomi*
- *Mahlon (meaning “sickly”)*
- *Kilion (meaning “wasting”)*
- *Orpah*
- *Ruth (4 v 10 gives more information)*

The Story

The book of Ruth begins as the story of one woman's personal tragedy.

What was the problem that set these events in motion (1 v 1)? What did Elimelek do in response?

What happened to Elimelek (v 3)?

What did the sons do (v 4)? What happened to them (v 5)?

How much time goes by in the first five verses (v 4)?

What did Naomi have at the beginning of the passage?

What does she have at the end?

One of the key challenges early in Ruth is figuring out how we are supposed to feel about the characters and their actions.

God had warned that he would send Israel famine if they worshiped idols (Deuteronomy 32 v 23-44). So it's possible—given the state of Israel during the time of the judges (see Judges 2 v 10-19; 21 v 25)—that Israel is experiencing God's discipline.

Further, it's probable that Elimelek was wrong to flee to Moab (a foreign nation), away from the promised land. It may be significant that at first Elimelek went to "sojourn" (Ruth 1 v 1, ESV) in Moab, then they "remained there" (v 2, ESV), and finally they "lived there" (v 4, ESV).

The people of Israel had a long and unpleasant history with the people of Moab, and God had told Israel that marrying foreign women was dangerous for their faith (Deuteronomy 7 v 1-4; see 1 Kings 11 v 1-6). Elimelek's sons marrying Moabite women would have sounded like bad news to the first readers of Ruth.

☺ Apply

Where in your life are there ways in which what seems most sensible, and what would be obedient to God are at odds with each other? What would risky obedience look like in those areas?

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Where You Go, I Go

Ruth 1 v 6-18

Naomi finds herself alone in a foreign land with two foreign daughters-in-law. What will she (and they) do next?

Naomi's Decision

Read Ruth 1 v 6-9

An unmarried or widowed woman in that society was very vulnerable, especially economically. Ruth and Orpah were young enough to pursue another marriage, but Naomi would have had very few ways to provide for herself.

Why did Naomi choose to return to Judah (v 6)?

What can we tell from these verses about Naomi's relationship with her daughters-in-law? Why do you think that Naomi wanted them to return to their homes?

The Response

Read Ruth 1 v 10-15

Ruth and Orpah respond to Naomi with protests (v 10), and you can understand why. They were family; they had been together for ten years and endured terrible losses in each other's company. But still, Naomi insists that they return (v 11). The expectation in the Israelite law was that the brother of the deceased would marry

his widow in order to make sure that she was provided for, but this was not going to happen here.

How does Naomi seek to convince them that she cannot provide for them (v 12-13)?

What does Orpah do in response (v 14-15)?

Ruth's God

Read Ruth 1 v 16-18

There are several signals in these verses that through her relationship with Naomi, Ruth had come to a place where she wanted to be a follower of the true God:

- In verse 17, she refers to him by his personal name (the LORD—"Yahweh").
- The land of Israel belonged to Yahweh in a special way. Ruth wanted to live there (v 16).
- The people of Israel were Yahweh's people. Ruth wanted to be part of them (v 16).
- In ancient times, people wanted to be buried in the land of their gods (so that they could be protected in the afterlife). Ruth wants to be buried in the place where Yahweh is worshiped (v 17).

Ruth's reaction is very striking in two ways. First, her suffering has not embittered her towards the LORD. Suffering makes us either run to God, or away from him. Ruth chose the first. Second, despite not being an Israelite, Ruth was confident that God would accept her. The rest of the book will show whether or not she is right.

☺ Apply

Do you ever have an Orpah moment, banking on worldly security instead of risking all to live as a follower of God? What would change if you lived with Ruth-like faith?

Call Me Bitter

Ruth 1 v 19-22

So far, we have not seen much of how Naomi feels about her suffering. Her return to her hometown will give her an opportunity to reflect on what has happened.

The Return

Read Ruth 1 v 19-21

The people of Bethlehem probably did not know what had become of Naomi and Elimelek and their sons during their decade in a foreign land. So when she appeared in town without her family (but with Ruth instead!), it created quite a commotion.

When the women of Bethlehem ask if this could be Naomi, she takes the opportunity to express her feelings about what has happened to her. She asks not to be called “Naomi” (meaning “pleasant”), but rather, “Mara” (meaning “bitter”).

Why does Naomi think that Mara would be a more fitting name for her?

How was she “full” when she left (v 21)? How is she “empty” now?

Naomi’s Theology

Naomi’s suffering reveals what she believes about God. She believes that the LORD is responsible for her pain; the Almighty has “brought misfortune” upon her (v 21).

She seems to believe that her suffering is evidence that the LORD is displeased with her in some way; he has “afflicted” her.

Read Psalm 135 v 6-7; Daniel 4 v 34-35; Isaiah 45 v 7

What do these passages tell us about God’s involvement in what happens to us, including painful events?

Can you think of times in the Bible when God used someone’s suffering to bring about a greater good? (Hint: Try Genesis 45 v 4-11; Acts 16 v 25-34.)

Good Things to Come

Read Ruth 1 v 22

If this is your first time reading the book of Ruth, then verse 22 might seem unimportant—just the author setting the scene for his readers. But if you know what is about to happen, then you know that the timing of events (at the beginning of the barley harvest) is evidence that God is at work to bless Naomi.

☺ Apply

Can you trust the Lord’s good plan even when it involves you suffering or losing out?

Naomi will discover through the events of the next three chapters how God is using her suffering for her good, the good of others, and the fulfillment of his plans. Living this side of the worst moment of human suffering in history—the cross—we can already be confident that this is how God uses all the events in our lives.

How do you particularly need to hear this, either as a comfort or challenge, today?

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A Short-term Solution

Ruth 2 v 1-13

Naomi's lack of a husband and sons was not only sad; it was a financial crisis. There were no grocery stores; how would she find food without land or crops of her own?

Read Ruth 2 v 1-13

Introducing Boaz

Ruth's plan (v 2) was to find a field and glean grain there. Landowners in those days would leave the edges of the fields unharvested and leave behind any grain that fell to the ground as it was being bundled by workers. The poor and needy could then come and "glean" this extra grain and have something to eat.

It is at this point that we are introduced to Boaz, the other main character in our story. In just a few short verses, we learn some very important information about him:

- He is a member of Elimelek's family, related to Naomi through marriage.
- He is a "man of standing" (v 1).
- He is a wealthy and influential man, a landowner and an employer.

In the Field

When Boaz finds out who Ruth is, he instructs her to continue gleaning in his fields. As you can imagine, an unmarried foreign woman like Ruth was very vulnerable while she was at work in the fields. But Boaz had instructed his workers not to touch her; in fact she was even welcome to the water they had drawn for themselves.

How do you think Ruth felt when she first walked into a stranger's field in a foreign land and began to collect grain for herself?

What fears might she have had?

How does she respond to Boaz's kindness (v 10 and 13)?

It is clear that Boaz is a faithful, law-keeping Israelite. Look at the LORD's commands and see how the author of Ruth is showing the reader Boaz's character: *read Deuteronomy 10 v 19; 24 v 19; Leviticus 19 v 9-10.*

☺ Apply

Boaz understands that his provision for Ruth is actually the LORD's kindness to her (Ruth 2 v 11-12). The LORD's love is often communicated to us through the love and kindness of his people.

How can you help one of God's children experience his love today?

This was the time of the Judges, when "everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (Judges 21 v 25, ESV). But Boaz did not—he did what was right in God's eyes. Life in his field was different, and better, because God's law ruled there.

How can you, and your church, provide a distinctive way of living to those around you—one that is godlier, more welcoming, and safer?

Filled to Overflowing

Ruth 2 v 14-23

Now, after so much pain and such a lot of uncertainty and struggle, Ruth and Naomi begin to see the hand of the LORD at work, through Boaz.

Plenty to Eat

Read Ruth 2 v 14-18

Boaz shows great kindness to Ruth, feeding her as if she were part of his work crew. He gives her free access to his fields and a safe place to work (v 22), and he even tells his workers to drop extra grain for her to gather. At the end of the day, Ruth has gathered and prepared more barley than she is likely able to carry. This situation carries on throughout the harvest. The main threat to Ruth and Naomi has been taken care of—they will have enough food to survive.

God provided for Ruth abundantly, but she also had to work diligently in the fields.

What does this tell us about the relationship between God's promise to care for us and our responsibility to work to provide for ourselves? In what ways might we get this relationship wrong?

Elimelek led his family out of Bethlehem—and out of God's land—because of a famine in the land (1 v 1).

How should we think about the times when God chooses not to provide for us abundantly?

☹ Pray

Take time to thank God for providing all of the things that you truly need. Thank him for what he has not provided, and ask him to help you to see what you “lack” as an opportunity to grow in godly contentment and gratitude. *Read 1 Timothy 6 v 6-10.*

The Pieces Come Together

Read Ruth 2 v 19-23

Naomi is excited to see Ruth come home with food, but she seems even more excited when she realizes that the man who has shown Ruth kindness is none other than Boaz, her husband’s relative! He is a “close relative” and a “guardian-redeemer” (what that means is about to become very important!).

Ruth and Naomi had returned from Moab empty-handed (1 v 21), but now both have plenty of food. The LORD is no longer described as the Almighty who has dealt bitterly with Naomi, but he is called the one who “has not stopped showing his kindness” (2 v 20).

Do you think Naomi wished she could take back what she had said in 1 v 20-21?

☹ Apply

Do you ever find that your heart is fickle, complaining about God’s provision for you one moment and then joyful when you later get what you want? What would be a godlier attitude in these times?

