

BEHIND THE SEEN

A 6-Week In-Depth Bible Study

RUTH

Rediscovering the Kindness of God



Shadia Hrichi

EXPERIENCE THE RICHES OF GOD'S KINDNESS THROUGH THE BELOVED STORY OF RUTH.

Ruth is one of only two books in the Bible named after a woman, and the only book named after a *foreign* woman. Yet the story of Ruth is read in Jewish synagogues every year during Shavuot (the harvest festival).

While the book of Ruth is often hailed as a tender love story, a central theme of the book is *kindness*. Unlike today's view of kindness as someone who is helpful or good-natured, biblical kindness often involves deep, unending loyalty. Join Shadia on a captivating journey of *kindness*, from a barren land to a barley field to a bold betrothal, and finally, to a *babe in a manger*.

“The wealth of God’s Word is infinite, and Shadia Hrichi’s ministry is a bona fide gift for those who love mining its treasure. Biblical Ruth may be familiar to you, but Shadia brings sound doctrine, enjoyable storytelling, and keen insight to the study of her life that offer application for each of our journeys.”

—**SHELLIE RUSHING TOMLINSON**, cohost of *Rocking It Grand* podcast and author of *Don't Try to Pray Like Her*

“Shadia’s meticulous attention to detail and commitment to excellent biblical scholarship make Ruth a rich resource I wholeheartedly recommend for both individual and group study. It is a beautiful invitation to rediscover God’s kindness for yourself in His unfolding story.”

—**KITTY ALLEN**, Senior Vice President, Culture & Organizational Development, Living on the Edge



Shadia Hrichi is a passionate Bible teacher, multi-award-winning author, and speaker who has a heart for seeing lives transformed by the power of God's Word. She holds a master's in biblical and theological studies as well as a master's in criminal justice. Shadia is the author of several Bible studies, including *Hagar*, *Legion*, *Tamar*, *Rahab*, and *Worthy of Love*. She is often invited to speak at churches, conferences, and retreats as well as serve on faculty for various Christian Writers conferences. Currently residing in northern California, Shadia loves to visit the ocean each week for “a date with Jesus.” To learn more about Shadia and the video teaching sessions available for the Behind the Seen series, visit www.shadiahrichi.com.

Praise for Ruth

"This is the best Bible study I've done all year!"

—**Francine Rivers**, international best-selling author

"The wealth of God's Word is infinite, and Shadia Hrichi's ministry is a bona fide gift for those who love mining its treasure. Biblical Ruth may be familiar to you, but Shadia brings sound doctrine, enjoyable storytelling, and keen insight to the study of her life that offer application for each of our journeys."

—**Shellie Rushing Tomlinson**, cohost of *Rocking It Grand* podcast and author of *Don't Try to Pray Like Her*

"Shadia is a gifted Bible teacher who brings a uniquely personal perspective, drawing readers into a deeper connection with God's Word. Her study on Ruth—one of my heroines of the faith, blessed to stand in the lineage of David and Jesus—beautifully engages both mind and heart in the truth of Scripture. Her meticulous attention to detail and commitment to excellent biblical scholarship make *Ruth: Rediscovering the Kindness of God* a rich resource I wholeheartedly recommend for individual or group study. More than that, it is a beautiful invitation to rediscover God's kindness for yourself in His unfolding story."

—**Kitty Allen**, Senior Vice President, Culture & Organizational Development, Living on the Edge

"Shadia guided me from the dusty roads of Moab to the golden grain fields of Bethlehem in the footsteps of Naomi and Ruth. I felt I could hear Naomi's bitter comments, smell the freshly cut barley, see hope rising in Ruth's eyes, and even taste the wedding feast wine alongside Boaz and Ruth. Deeply rooted in Scripture through her thorough exegesis, Shadia is a delightful storyteller, made in the image of the True Storyteller. Your faith will swell and your hope will blossom when you let Shadia carry you to the heart of Jesus, Christ, Lord and Savior, Kinsman Redeemer, and Heavenly Husband."

—**Stephanie Rousselle**, founder and host of the top 1% globally ranked podcast *Gospel Spice* and author of *Awaken Delight*

"Shadia Hrichi has done it again with a rich, deep, and relatable Bible study on an important figure in Scripture. This time she offers a fresh perspective on the book of Ruth, focusing on the theme of kindness, which she defines as deep, unending loyalty and steadfast love. The book is grounded in careful research, but the author makes the teaching readily accessible to the general reader. Even if you have studied the book of Ruth before, Shadia brings out unexpected elements of the story. The questions and other interactive elements in the book help readers dig deeper to enrich their own faith. I was inspired by this study and highly recommend it."

—**Joseph Bentz**, Professor of English, Azusa Pacific University, and author of *Nothing Is Wasted* and *A Son Comes Home*

“Once again, Shadia Hrichi brings the Bible to life in soul-stirring ways. This peek inside Ruth is an invaluable treasure that has helped me more fully understand the God who sees each of us. What beauty unfolds when faith-filled people yield to an almighty God!”

—**Tara Johnson**, award-winning author and speaker

“God’s *hesed*—His loving-kindness—shines through the pages of Shadia Hrichi’s study on the book of Ruth. She expertly combines well-researched exegesis with application, bringing to life this ancient story about widows and a God whose kindness never wavers. By providing four different levels at which to engage, Shadia meets you where you are in your faith journey—or just where you are this week! Experience God’s *hesed* as you enjoy *Ruth: Rediscovering the Kindness of God* with Shadia and your community.”

—**Tiffanie N. Limbrick**, Licensing and Legal Affairs Counsel for a Global Christian Media Company

“With impeccable research and an easy reading style, Shadia retells the familiar story of Ruth in a fresh way, inviting the reader to see the kindness of God in their own story. If you’ve ever felt alone or unseen, this study is for you!”

—**Bruce W. Martin**, author of *Desperate for Hope*

RUTH

God Is Always Working
BEHIND THE SEEN

RUTH

Rediscovering the Kindness of God

Shadia Hrichi


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RUTH
Rediscovering the Kindness of God



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To Erin Sivils, Liz Nunez, and Carolyn Jacobsen.
Your friendship, faithfulness, and kindness over the years have been
among the sweetest blessings in my life. I'm grateful to each one of you.
May the Lord repay you for your kindness!

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Ten years ago, God placed it on my heart to set a goal: to write and teach five in-depth Bible studies in a decade. I never could have imagined the challenges I'd face along the way, but the difficulties were precisely what God would use to prepare my heart for studies He would have me write. Ruth is that fifth study, and I stand here in awe, humbled by all the Lord has carried me through to reach this moment. And yet, a goal like this is never accomplished alone. It truly takes a community of faithful friends and ministry partners. While there is not enough time or space to mention every person to whom I am grateful, I wish to express deep gratitude to those who specifically played key roles in helping bring this new study into the world.

To my amazing team of beta readers—Sandi Miller, Kendra Burrows, Terry Thornton, Kristi Hewitt, Tara Johnson, and Jeannie Pittam: Thank you for reading these pages while they were still a work in progress. Each of you brought something no one else could have brought, and this study is richer, warmer, and more refined because of you. I am so grateful God brought each of you into my life.

To my beloved friends and family and to the leadership and congregation at Venture Christian Church: You have prayed for me, cheered me on, and carried me through more than you know. I am deeply grateful to belong to a community as godly, generous, and loving as this one.

To Shellie Rushing Tomlinson, Kitty Allen, Stephanie Rousselle, Joseph Bentz, Tara Johnson, Tiffanie Limbrick, and Bruce Martin: What a blessing each of you is to me. Your willingness to read an early copy of this study and offer your thoughtful endorsement is a gift I will forever treasure. I know many things compete for your time; your sacrifice is one I do not take lightly. Thank you! May the Lord bless you tenfold for your kindness!



To my devoted readers, both those who have journeyed with me through four studies already and nudged me (kindly, but persistently!) toward this fifth one, and to those I have yet to meet: It is one of the great honors of my life to walk alongside you in your faith journey. Your encouraging notes, emails, messages, and cards—many of which I have tucked into the pages of my journals—remind me of why I do what I do. Thank you for inviting me into your hearts and homes. May I continue to be worthy of the trust you place in me as we explore God's holy Word together.

To the entire team at Leafwood Publishers: Your commitment to excellence has helped bring book number five to its final form—from developmental edit to copyedit to typeset and cover design, along with sales and marketing and all who serve quietly behind the scenes. I am deeply grateful for every person on your team, and I am honored to serve the Lord together in bringing these studies into the world.

Most of all, I give my utmost thanks to my King and Savior, Jesus Christ, whose love and kindness have carried me through every day of my life—even when I did not know You. It is my prayer that many souls would rediscover the *hesed* kindness of God through this humble work. To Your Name alone be glory, honor, and praise, forever and ever! Amen!



ABOUT THE AUTHOR



SHADIA HRICHI is a multi-award-winning author and speaker whose greatest joy is hearing her readers say, “You make me want to read the Bible more.” No stranger to personal heartbreak and loss—including abortion, date rape, and divorce—Shadia teaches with

a rare authenticity, weaving together personal story, vivid illustration, and an unwavering trust in biblical authority to bring Scripture to life in fresh and unexpected ways.

She received a master’s degree in biblical and theological studies from Western Seminary, as well as a master’s degree in criminal justice from the State University of New York. Shadia is the author of several award-winning Bible studies, including *Rahab*, *Tamar*, *Legion*, and *Hagar*, all in her Behind the Seen series, and *Worthy of Love*, a story-driven Bible study for post-abortion healing.

In addition to teaching Bible studies, Shadia is often invited to speak at churches, retreats, conferences, and other events, where her passion for seeing God’s people live courageously in light of eternity is simply contagious. In addition to writing and speaking, Shadia has served on the faculty for a number of Christian writers conferences, and she provides workshops, coaching, and other resources for aspiring authors.

Currently residing in Northern California, Shadia loves to visit the ocean each week for a “date with Jesus.” Be sure to visit www.shadiahrichi.com and join Shadia’s ministry email community to receive Bible study tips, free resources, and updates on her writing. *Ruth* is the fifth study in her Behind the Seen series, where readers rediscover how God is always working *behind the seen*. Be among the first to be notified of the next study!



ABOUT THE STUDY

WELCOME, FRIEND. WHETHER YOU HAVE TREASURED THE story of Ruth for years or have only skimmed the surface, our exploration of her story is guaranteed to leave you amazed and inspired. Witness how God weaves faith, courage, and kindness into His sovereign plan, and join me in *Rediscovering the Kindness of God*.

This book is divided into six weeks, each comprising five days of personal study. For added flexibility, choose a commitment level that works best for you: “light” (15 minutes/day), “moderate” (30 minutes/day), “in-depth” (45 minutes/day), or “all-in” (60 minutes/day). See Group Study Tips for more details.

Each day of study includes one or more questions suitable for group discussion. These questions are followed by a ☺. Be sure not to overlook these questions, even if you are working through the material on your own. There are also Pause to Ponder sections throughout the study; these are designed to provide you with a time of personal reflection. Use the space in the margin (or, if you prefer, a journal or notebook) to respond to these questions. For readers desiring to dig even deeper, I’ve prepared Extra questions, which are preceded by a ☺.

At the end of each day, there is a Your Turn section for personal application. These questions are important. While studying the Bible can stir our hearts and open our eyes to wonderful truths, only when we apply what we have learned will the study have a lasting impact for God’s kingdom. In addition to this workbook, optional video teaching sessions are available at www.shadiahrichi.com.

During my study of Ruth, I often found myself fascinated by secondary topics related to the material. The Supplemental Readings I included throughout the study are not essential, but you may find them enjoyable and informative. I have included a section called Group Study Tips, which you may find useful if you are doing the study as a group.



One quick note: Some paraphrase versions of the Bible may be inadequate for the purposes of this study. Whenever possible, it is recommended that you complete the exercises using a Bible translation that adheres to a more literal translation, such as the English Standard Version, New American Standard Bible, New King James Version, or King James Version.

Before you begin, take a few moments to ask the Holy Spirit to guide you over the next six weeks and to bless your commitment to this study. Then, as you open your Bible and your heart, begin each day with an eager expectation of *Rediscovering the Kindness of God*.



GROUP STUDY TIPS

BECAUSE ANY DEEP WORK OF GOD REQUIRES A SACRIFICE

of time spent in His Word and in His presence, the volume of material in an in-depth study can be challenging for some participants. For this reason, several suggestions are provided to help you facilitate the study when participants have varying levels of time constraints.

Video Teaching Sessions

Seven optional video teaching sessions serve to complement and enhance the study. Watch Session One before you begin. Then, watch Session Two through Session Six before completing Week Two through Week Six in the study. Finally, watch Session Seven when you finish the study as a wrap-up. Sessions average between twenty and twenty-five minutes in length. Video sessions are available at www.shadiahrichi.com/ruth.

Plan an Extended Schedule

Instead of meeting for six weeks, allow two weeks for each chapter, for a total of twelve weeks. Every other week, invite participants to watch and discuss Shadia's video teaching sessions. These modifications will also provide periodic opportunities for participants to "catch up" on anything they may have missed or to spend extra time on areas of the study they may wish to explore further.

Customized Commitments for a Six-Week Schedule

Based on a six-week format, the following are suggested assignments based on an individual's time constraints.



For All Participants

- Read through each day's material, including the assigned Bible passages.
- Optional: Read the Supplemental Reading section as provided in various weeks.

Light (15 minutes a day)

- Complete the Your Turn personal application section at the end of each day.
- If you have time, complete the Group Discussion questions, identified with a ☯.

Moderate (30 minutes a day)

- Complete the various Pause to Ponder personal reflection sections as well as the Your Turn personal application section at the end of each day.
- Complete the Group Discussion questions identified with a ☯.

In-Depth (45 minutes a day)

- Complete all questions except for the Extra questions identified with a ☯.

All-In (60 minutes a day)

- Complete all the questions, including the Extra questions identified with a ☯.
- Read all the Supplemental Reading sections.

May the Lord bless you as you journey through this study!



A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

THIS IS THE FIFTH BOOK IN MY BEHIND THE SEEN SERIES.

Originally, I did not plan on writing a Bible study on Ruth. Not because I don't love the story—I do! But let's face it, there are already a lot of studies written about her. Do we really need one more? When my friend Francine Rivers sent me an email, encouraging me to continue writing studies highlighting the women in Christ's lineage, I felt the Lord's gentle nudge to step out in faith.

After studying Ruth's story for over a year, I came to realize that perhaps no other story in the Bible captures the concept of my theme *Behind the Seen* like Ruth. With God's sovereignty all but hidden in the written pages, yet clearly at work throughout the story, I've come to see Ruth in a whole new light.

Ruth is one of only two books in the Bible named after a woman, and it's the only book named after a foreign woman. And yet the story of Ruth is read in Jewish synagogues every year during Shavuot (the harvest festival). While the book of Ruth is often hailed as a tender love story, a central theme of the book is kindness. Unlike today's view of kindness as someone who is helpful or good-natured, biblical kindness often involves deep, unending loyalty.

Friend, I invite you to come with me on a captivating journey of kindness: from a barren land, to a barley field, to a bold betrothal, and finally, to a babe in a manger.

Are you ready? Let's rediscover the kindness of God.

Your sister in Christ,

Shadia

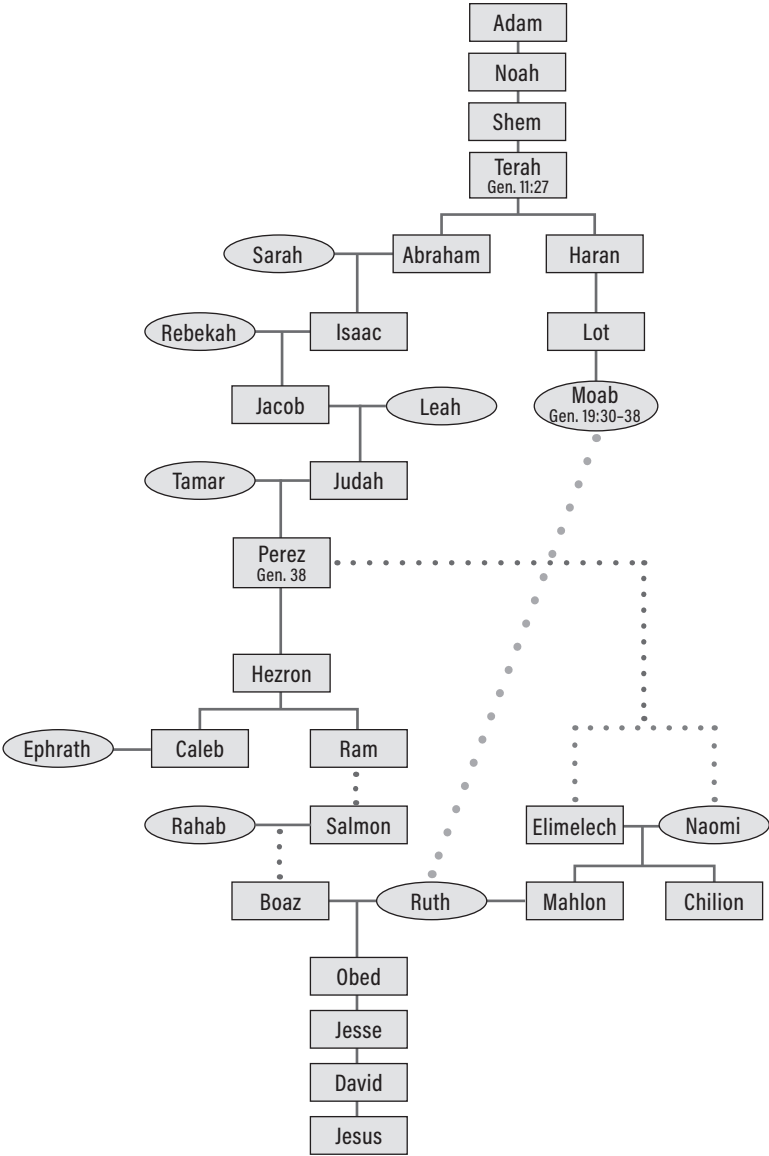


“But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy.”

—Titus 3:4–5



THE GENEALOGY OF RUTH



Note: Genealogy is condensed for illustrative purposes; not all generations or individual family members are shown. A printable version of this chart is included in the Ruth Bonus Packet, which you can download for free by visiting shadiahrichi.com/bonus.



PART I

FAMINE



A LAND WITHOUT KINDNESS OR A KING

THE BOOK OF RUTH, BELOVED IN BOTH JEWISH AND Christian traditions, is set against the backdrop of the volatile period of the judges, a dark time when the people of God repeatedly succumbed to idolatry—and even civil war. However, the last chapters end with hints at a future king who would unite the troubled tribes. Meanwhile, when a famine prompts a small family to move from Bethlehem to Moab, more tragedy strikes. But God uses these events to open a door for an exceptionally kind Moabite woman to join God’s covenant community.

DAY ONE No Peace in the Promised Land

Although I didn’t plan it this way, I am writing today’s lesson during Holy Week. For more than two millennia, believers around the world have cherished and celebrated the significance of this annual reminder of God’s love. The days leading up to Good Friday invite us into a time of somber reflection, followed by Easter Sunday, when we celebrate the hope we share in Christ’s resurrection. Less attention, however, is given to Saturday, sometimes referred to as Holy Saturday. This

WEEK ONE

.....

Interesting fact: In the New Testament, no one Greek word fully captures the Hebrew understanding of kindness, or *hesed*. The best equivalents are *agape* (love, particularly divine love), *eleos* (mercy), and *charis* (grace).

.....

is the day *in between*. A day in between darkness and light. In between sorrow and celebration. In between cruel death and new life.

The book of Ruth is similar, depicting events that occur *in between*. In between the period of the judges and the promise of a king. In between a time of fractured tribes and the dream of a unified nation. In between one family's heartbreak and one faithful God.

Waiting for a King

During my first years as a new believer, the book of Ruth quickly became a cherished love story. And although the story of Ruth and Boaz is often celebrated as a tender romance, and I am eager for us to dive into their relationship in the weeks ahead, a central theme of the book is kindness (*hesed* in Hebrew). It doesn't just refer to surface-level or momentary kindness; rather, this Hebrew word often involves deep covenantal loyalty.

The Hebrew word *hesed* encompasses such a depth of meaning that no single English word can fully capture it. In the Old Testament, the word has been translated as steadfast love, kindness, lovingkindness, faithfulness, loyalty, mercy, and other comparable terms. Perhaps the best summary is found in Exodus 34:5–7, where God proclaims His personal name (*Yahweh*, rendered LORD in our English Bibles) to Moses, along with a description of who He is. God uses the Hebrew word *hesed*, translated “steadfast love,” not once, but twice!

The LORD descended in the cloud and stood with [Moses] there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. . . . “The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin.”

Before we dive further, let's get some context. In the Bible, the book of Ruth is sandwiched between the book of Judges, when God appointed local judges to rule over the twelve tribes of the future nation of Israel, and the book of 1 Samuel, when the nation of Israel received her first king. The period of the judges began soon after the Israelites entered and partially established themselves in the Promised Land under the leadership of Joshua. Sadly, it did not take long after the death of Joshua for the next generation to become complacent in their God-given mission to drive the inhabitants with their wicked idolatry out of the land. Judges 2:10 tells us that “there arose another generation . . . who did not know the LORD or the work that he had done for Israel.” In just one generation, God's people had all but abandoned their loving king, only crying out to Him in their distress after incurring His anger because of their idolatry.



Reflect on your prayer life over the past month. Place an X on the part of the line that best represents your approach to prayer.

Pray only when desperate

Pray throughout each day

PAUSE TO PONDER

Consider your prayer life one year ago and where you are now. Has anything changed? What one thing can you do right now to further develop your prayer life? Who do you know that has a robust prayer life? What do you suppose contributes to their devotion? If you could use some help building your “prayer muscles,” consider reaching out to this person and asking what has contributed to their strong prayer life.

*Record your thoughts in the margin.
Do this for all Pause to Ponder sections.*

Throughout the book of Judges, which spans roughly three hundred years of history,¹ we read of the Israelites spiraling in a cycle of sin and idolatry, suffering under foreign oppressors, crying out to God for rescue, and God raising up a deliverer (judge), only for the people to rebel once again, often succumbing to deeper and deeper depravity. At one point, a band of wicked men from the tribe of Benjamin commits a horrendous crime that many consider to be the most brutal recorded in all the Bible.² If that were not vile enough, the leaders of the city where the crime took place refused to bring the guilty men to justice—an act that led all of Israel into a bloody civil war.

It is against this violent, lawless backdrop—a land without kindness or a king—where we encounter the story of Ruth. While the tribes of Israel are spiraling further into spiritual degeneracy, the book of Ruth underscores the faithful devotion of three people who, against all odds, choose to cling to the Lord. But I’m getting ahead of myself. While I am eager to dive into the details of Ruth, it’s important for us, as careful students of God’s Word, to first take some time to examine the context that sets the stage for our story. With that in mind, we will focus today’s lesson on exploring a handful of noteworthy passages in the books of Joshua and Judges. In the Bible, these two books immediately precede the book of Ruth.

“Then the LORD raised up judges, who saved them out of the hand of those who plundered them. Yet they did not listen to their judges, for they whored after other gods.

—Judges 2:16–17

WHEN DID THE EVENTS OF RUTH TAKE PLACE?

While we will not begin reading the book of Ruth until tomorrow's lesson, the question of where it fits in the biblical timeline may be helpful to provide additional context. This optional supplemental reading assumes some familiarity with the book of Ruth, but if the story is unfamiliar to you, don't let that get in the way. We'll cover all the details in the days ahead.

No one knows who wrote the book of Ruth. Scholars also differ as to when the book was written, as well as to when exactly the events in the book occurred. Because the genealogy at the end of the book mentions David, who had not yet been born, some suggest the genealogy was added later, while others propose that the book, written as a whole, was written during or after the reign of David.³ In Ruth 4:7, we are told that the custom involving the exchange of one's sandal occurred "in former times." This statement tells us that this practice was no longer active, suggesting that a considerable amount of time had passed between when the events occurred and when the book was written.

What we do know, based on Ruth 1:1, is that the events of the book take place during the period of the judges (approximately 1380 to 1050 BC, the time between the conquest of the Promised Land and the crowning of Israel's first king), which narrows the window to a span of roughly three hundred years. Scholars who place the events of Ruth near the beginning of this period cite Matthew 1:5, which describes Rahab as being the mother of Boaz (who marries Ruth). Rahab lived during the early period of the judges. As Judges spans nearly three hundred years, certainly Boaz was not two hundred or more years old when he encountered Ruth. However, this earlier timeline must then assume that at least one portion of the genealogy at the end of Ruth (4:20–21; also cited in 1 Chron. 2:11) had been condensed.⁴

On the other hand, those who prefer a timeline later in Judges cite the genealogy at the end of Ruth where David is listed as the great-grandson of Ruth and Boaz. Based on the estimated dates of David's reign (approximately 1010–970 BC), in this view, Boaz must have lived in the later period of the judges. Regardless of whether the short genealogy at the end of Ruth was written at the time the rest of Ruth was written or was added later, those in the second camp hold that Rahab had to be a distant ancestress of Boaz rather than his mother. This would then require that the genealogy in Matthew 1 is the one which had been condensed.

Most scholars fall into the second camp, placing the events of Ruth near the end of the period of the Judges, based on the fact that the book of Judges



anticipates a coming king, and the end of Ruth anticipates the birth of Israel's beloved King David. Whichever camp one leans toward, given the various opinions among respected biblical scholars, any attempt to force a precise timeline would be unwise. God reveals that the events occurred during the period of the judges, and He seems content to leave it at that.

Now that we have some background, let's continue our overview of what happened after God's people entered the Promised Land.

Read Joshua 24:16-18 and 21-24. What promise did God's people make?

Read Judges 1:16-36. How many times do we read that God's people failed to "drive out" the natives from the land God promised them? Circle one.

Once

Twice

Three times

Seven times

Read Joshua 23:11-13 and Judges 2:6-22. Briefly summarize the reasons God's people failed to take full possession of the Promised Land, according to Judges 2:19-21.

PAUSE TO PONDER

Name one negative influence in your life right now that is hindering your efforts to grow spiritually, such as a false belief, stronghold, disobedience, unhealthy or toxic relationship, or environment. Spend a few moments in prayer, asking God to reveal one step you can take this week to begin to address this spiritual obstacle. Record your commitment in the margin.

Loss of Identity

In the first chapter of the book of Judges, we discovered not one but *seven* occurrences when God's people failed to drive out the inhabitants of the land God had given to them (Judg. 1:19, 21, 27, 29, 30, 31, 33). Along with the failure to fulfill their God-given mission, the Israelites began to intermarry with the people of the



other nations (something God specifically forbade them to do; Deut. 7:1–4). This rebellion against God led to more idolatry, infighting among the tribes, and ultimately civil war (Judg. 20). It's here that we might be tempted to shake our heads, thinking, *How on earth did it get so bad—and so fast?* After all, God's people were finally living in the Promised Land! The event their ancestors had been waiting for and dreaming about for generations! But Joshua warned that this would happen.

Reread Joshua 23:11–13. Where does the blame ultimately rest on the people's failure to take full possession of the Promised Land? Circle one.

military failure

God's failure

spiritual failure

How are obedience to God and experiencing God's promises connected in this passage? (Hint: See also Judges 2:11–15.)

 Consider your answer to the previous question. What general principle can you apply to your own life as a child of God?

With their champion Joshua no longer leading them, the later generations quickly lost sight of their identity as God's people. The blame for the tribes' failure did not rest on military weakness, or on God's failure to keep His promise, but on the people's spiritual disobedience and consequential moral decline.

Write Judges 21:25 below.

What happens when people lack godly leadership, based on this verse?

How have you or someone you love suffered under a lack of godly leadership (perhaps at home, or at work, or even in church)? 



How might this grieve God? *☪*

Not once but four times in the book of Judges the writer reminds his audience that God's people have no leader, that is, a king (Judg. 17:6, 18:1, 19:1, 21:25). Twice this statement is followed by the tragic reality that "everyone did what was right in his own eyes"—with one of these statements serving as the writer's last words of the book. Quite a somber ending, wouldn't you say?

Yet it is during the time of the Judges when the events of Ruth take place, offering a bright light in the midst of a dark season in Israel's history.

Reflect on this pronouncement: "Everyone did what was right in his own eyes."
How do you see this tendency at work in our world today? *☪*

How about in your workplace or school or family? *☪*

I don't know about you, but I see this tendency all around me and within myself at times. Living in a world swarming with all kinds of chaos and confusion, with few patches of peace in between, I am grateful that I serve a God who never changes and whose Word will never fail.

..... Your Turn

Though the Israelites witnessed firsthand the long-awaited dream of entering the Promised Land, few experienced the peace and blessings their ancestors anticipated.

Is there a particular area in your life where you struggle to follow God's leading, preferring to do what is right in your own eyes? If you're unsure, spend some time in prayer asking God to help you see where this may be an issue.

What do you suppose is at the root of this mindset?

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"For I the LORD do not change." And Jesus assures us, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away." —Malachi 3:6 and Matthew 24:35

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What would it look like to surrender to God's leading in this area?

What might be holding you back? What might you gain?

DAY TWO

Taking Refuge in Foreign Territory

Years ago, when my former husband and I lived in New York, the economy suffered a downturn. It was so severe that we decided to pack up and move across the country. After selling our home and leaving behind family, friends, and everything that was familiar, we eventually landed in Northern California. Moving from one rental home to another, I never felt settled, but nothing prepared me for the day when the divorce papers came.

Though I felt all alone, I knew I was not alone. God was with me, even when I was not aware of His presence. He is omnipresent (He exists everywhere at all times), and He is especially drawn toward us when we are fearful or brokenhearted (Isa. 41:10; Ps. 34:18).

PAUSE TO PONDER

Read Psalm 139:7 in the margin. (Optional: Read Psalm 139:1–12 in your Bible.) Reflect on a time when you felt all alone. Looking back, do you recognize God's presence in your situation? If so, how did He intervene or use the situation for good? If you do not recognize God at work, spend a few moments in prayer, asking God to show you in what ways He was present in your situation.

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 "Where shall I go from your
 Spirit? Or where shall I
 flee from your presence?"
 —Psalm 139:7



A Famine in the Land

Yesterday, we took some time to explore the backstory of Ruth as presented in the book of Judges. Whereas Judges centers on the activity of tribes and nations, the book of Ruth centers on the activity of one small Israelite family.

Read Ruth 1:1-5 to get an overview of the introduction to the story. Fill in the missing words based on the first verse. I completed one for you. (Note: The phrases below do not follow the sequence in which they appear in the biblical text.)

WHO: a man [from] _____ in Judah . . . with his _____ and two sons

WHAT: went to sojourn

WHEN: in the days when the _____ ruled

WHERE: went to sojourn in the [land] of _____

WHY: a _____ was in the land

The author provides quite a wealth of information in just one verse. Let's begin by looking at the first phrase, "In the days when the judges ruled." Skip ahead for a moment and read Ruth 4:22, which is the last verse in the book. Write whose name appears as the last word in the book: _____

Without doing any research, what do you know about this person based on what you have heard or read?

☞ Do you think the mention of this name at the end of Ruth is significant? Why or why not? (Hint: See Judges 21:25.)

Considering only the first and last verses of the book of Ruth, already we are given a hint as to where the author might be headed. In his first words, the author (whose identity is unknown) does more than simply state that the events of Ruth take place during the period of the judges. He makes it a point to mention that the events take place during the time when the judges *ruled* (or governed) the tribes



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In Hebrew, "Bethlehem" means "House of Bread." Originally, Ephrath represented the village of Bethlehem itself (Gen. 35:19) but later expanded to encompass the general region, including the village. As the twelve tribes of Israel (originating from Jacob's twelve sons; Gen. 35:22-26) settled in the land, extended families formed, called sub-tribes or clans. In time, a clan of Judah living in the region of Bethlehem became known as Ephrathites.

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of Israel. It is the *leadership* of this era that is being highlighted. The author wants his readers to consider the events of Ruth in light of how God's people, without a spiritual leader to unite and guide them, had lost their shared identity as the people of God and, as we read yesterday, "everyone did what was right in his own eyes."

The author's aim is even clearer when we take into account the genealogy at the end of Ruth. We will cover the genealogy in more detail in the weeks ahead, but in short, this genealogy invites readers to anticipate the birth of Israel's beloved King David, who would unite the people and draw their hearts back to God. One commentary author says that the aim of the book of Ruth "is to explain how, in the providence of God, the divinely chosen King David could emerge from the dark period of the judges."⁵ While this is certainly one aim of the book (or at least the aim of the genealogy at the end), it is far from the only aim, but I am getting ahead of myself.

The events in Ruth take place in between the death of Joshua and the crowning of the nation's first king, Saul, whose disastrous reign paves the way for the nation's second king, David. Although many of the Israelites turned aside from their covenant relationship with God following the death of Joshua, the book of Ruth offers hope for the fractured nation through the courage and kindness of two women, the compassion of one man, and the providence of Almighty God. Let's now return to the beginning and continue our exploration of the story.

Reread Ruth 1:1-2 and complete the sentence:

They were _____ from Bethlehem in Judah.

Consider again Ruth 1:1-2 along with the definition of Bethlehem in the margin. How does the definition of Bethlehem contrast with the trial this family experienced as presented in Ruth 1:1?

Read Judges 3:12-15 and 29-30, then answer the following questions.

Who was subject to whom and for how long, according to verses 12-14?

Who was subject to whom and for how long, according to verse 30?



☞ Considering the history between the Israelites and Moabites, do you find Elimelech's choice to leave Bethlehem and sojourn in Moab surprising? Disappointing? Intriguing? Share your thoughts. (Note: The events in Judges 3 likely occurred roughly two hundred years prior to the events in Ruth.)

Intense hostility existed between the two groups for much of biblical history.⁶ After the Israelites came out of Egypt and were freed from their slavery, the people of Moab refused to allow the Israelites to cross their territory on their way to the Promised Land (Judg. 11:17–18). Even worse, they led the Israelites into idolatry while they were camped on the edge of the Promised Land (Num. 25:1–3). Once they entered the Promised Land, the Israelites were subsequently oppressed and attacked by the Moabites (Judg. 3).

It's no wonder the Israelites felt such animosity toward the Moabites. Because of the Moabites' refusal to allow the Israelites passage, God prohibited Moabites from entering the assembly of the Lord (likely referring to Moabite males joining in the religious community, which was consecrated to God⁷), even to ten generations (Deut. 23:3–4)! Consequently, for the original readers of the story, Elimelech's choice to sojourn in Moab is an unexpected backdrop for the events.

Try to place yourself in Elimelech's sandals as he decides whether to take his family to Moab to escape a famine. Do you think his decision was wise? Foolish? Noble? Unfaithful? (Note: As this question calls for speculation, there is no right or wrong answer.) ☞

The House of Bread Has No Food

The story is curious from the start in that the famine takes place in Bethlehem: The “house of bread” has no food. Seems ironic, given that God Himself described the Promised Land as “a land flowing with milk and honey” (Exod. 3:8, 17). Sadly, the Israelites rebelled against God, leading them to experience many of the calamities about which God had specifically warned them in the days of Moses.

In Deuteronomy 28:15–68 (prior to the people entering the Promised Land), God spoke to Moses, promising “blessings” for obedience and “curses” for disobedience, aiming to motivate God's people to remain faithful to God's covenant.

A Land without Kindness or a King



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Bible study tip: If a proper reading of the text does not depict an event as divine judgment or punishment for sin, then we cannot claim that these are occurring either.

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These “curses” included famine, disease, infertility, and death, to name a few. While the famine in the land during the time of the Judges was a fearful, physical reality, when we consider the decaying spiritual landscape among God’s people, it hints at a spiritual famine as well.

Scholars hold differing opinions concerning Elimelech’s decision to leave the Promised Land. After all, settling in the Promised Land was just the beginning; God intended His people to conquer the land and set up His name as the One True God on the earth.⁸ One commentary author observes, “Given what we know about the period of the judges, it is possible that the famine in Bethlehem and perhaps even the deaths of Elimelech and his sons and their childless marriages were linked to covenant unfaithfulness.”⁹ In the Old Testament, deity, people, and land are intimately connected (see Judg. 11:23–24). Because the people of Moab worshiped the evil so-called god Chemosh—worship that involved child sacrifice—the author goes on to suggest that perhaps “Elimelech’s decision to leave the ‘promised’ land to sojourn in Moab, where Chemosh ruled, suggests desperation and perhaps even lack of faith.”¹⁰

At the same time, it’s significant to observe that nothing in the text of Ruth suggests divine displeasure or divine punishment. If a proper reading of the text does not depict an event as divine judgment or punishment for sin, then it is best to exercise caution in drawing such conclusions (consider the story of Job). Whichever is the case, the Hebrew text does include a hint that seems to place Elimelech’s decision in a more favorable light, which is difficult to discern in English.

In Ruth 1:1–2, the place Elimelech chooses for his family to sojourn is *sa-deh Mo-ab* in Hebrew. While our English Bibles often translate these words as “country” or “land” of Moab, the literal translation is “fields” of Moab (referring to fields or open plains of Moab, which were likely uninhabited). The same word is used in 1:6 and throughout the rest of Ruth. Not once does the author use the typical Hebrew word *eres Mo-ab*, “land [or country] of Moab,” as Moab is referenced elsewhere in the Old Testament.¹¹

The difference might seem subtle, but as the Hebrew wording *sa-deh Mo-ab* appears throughout the book of Ruth, the author’s choice of words appears intentional. At least two reasons are possible. First, various “fields” serve as key locations for significant events throughout the story. Second, choosing to sojourn in the “fields of Moab” might indicate an attempt to guard the family, at least to some extent, from the corrupt influences of the Moabites and their idol worship, which would have been more concentrated in the cities and towns where most of the people lived. At that time, people worshiped many so-called gods, and each was assumed to rule over a specific territory on earth. Chemosh, the national god of Moab, was one of these.



As for the famine, even if the famine was God's response to the Israelites' general unfaithfulness as recorded in the book of Judges, the book of Ruth is strangely silent concerning Elimelech's motives. But Scripture offers additional clues in the story of Abraham and Sarah. Let's see what we can discover.

Read Genesis 12:10–16. Write verse 12:10 below.

List two or three similarities between Genesis 12:10–13 and Ruth 1:1.

The writer of neither passage indicates whether God compelled each man to sojourn in a foreign land or if it was the man's own idea, and if it was, whether God approved of the choice. For Abraham, despite his willingness to put his wife and future promised line at risk, he and Sarah ended up benefiting financially from the experience. Similarly, while Elimelech put himself and his family at risk with his move, the parallels with Genesis 12 hint that blessings may be in store for the survivors of Elimelech's family as well.¹² Either way, when Scripture is silent concerning God's pleasure or displeasure of a person's actions, we would be wise to refrain from making judgments ourselves.

..... Your Turn

In what area of your life are you currently experiencing a famine of sorts (perhaps spiritually, such as lack of faith or courage, or practically, such as lack of finances or resources)?

Spend a few moments in prayer. Ask God to reveal anything you might need to confess or repent of. If He brings something to mind, voice a prayer of confession to Him right now. He already knows, and He is ready to receive you with open arms.

If nothing comes to mind, offer a prayer of praise to God for His goodness, faithfulness, and power to carry you through whatever you are currently facing.

Wherever you are in this matter, ask God to show you one specific step you can take this week as you seek to trust Him in your time of need. In the margin, write a prayer to God expressing your commitment to obey this next step as God leads.

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Bible study tip: When Scripture is silent concerning God's pleasure or displeasure of a person's actions, we would be wise to refrain from making judgments ourselves.

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