



R O T H

THE GOD WHO PROVIDES

4 STUDIES FOR GROUP OR PERSONAL USE

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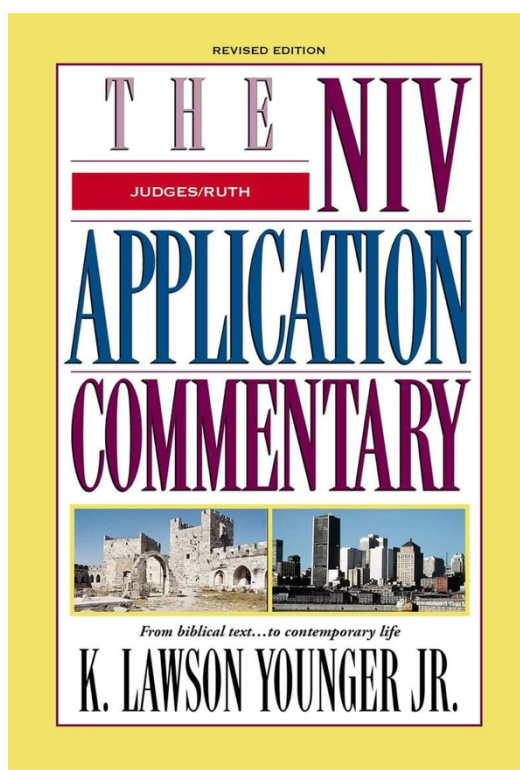
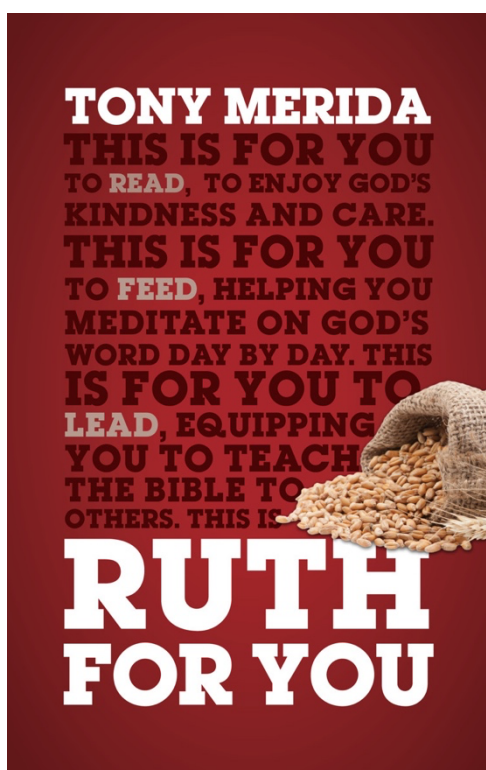
Series Overview

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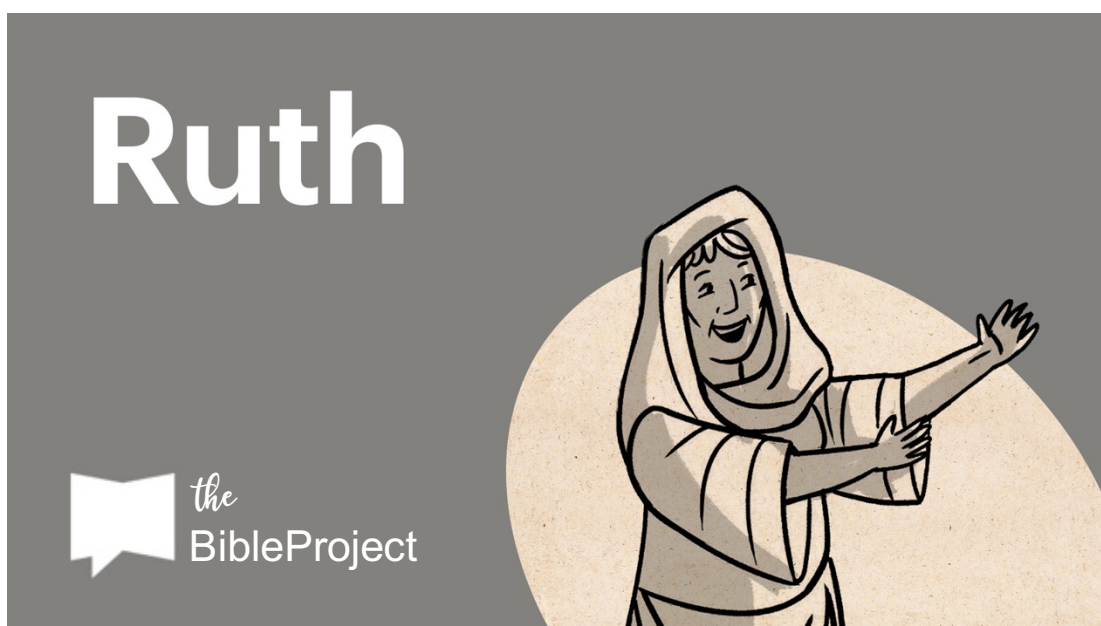
These studies are adapted from *Ruth: My Redeemer Lives* written by Mike Smith (2011), with reference to *Ruth: The Lord Provides* by Tony Merida (The Good Book Guide, 2020). Several helpful insights are owed to *Judges and Ruth* (The NIV Application Commentary) by K. Lawson Younger Jr.

HELPFUL RESOURCES

BOOKS



VIDEO



SERIES OVERVIEW

Ruth is named after one its main characters, a young woman of Moab, the great-grandmother of King David, and an ancestress of Jesus (Matthew 1:1,5). The only other Biblical book bearing the name of a woman is *Esther*. The author is unknown. The literary style of Hebrew used in *Ruth* suggests that it was written during the period of the monarchy.

The story is set in the time of the judges, a time characterised in the book of *Judges* as a period of spiritual and moral degeneracy, national disunity and general foreign oppression. *Ruth* reflects a temporary time of peace between Israel and Moab (contrast *Judges* 3:12–30).

Short though it is, the book of *Ruth* is a compelling story. In addition to its intriguing *setting* (the pre-king time of the judges, with locations such as Bethlehem, Moab, Boaz's field, a threshing floor and a city gate), we as readers are drawn to the *characters*: grieving Naomi, loyal Ruth, compassionate Boaz. The *plot* involves a story of redemption which, as we learn, is part of the grand story of redemption (4:17–22). Naomi stands in the middle of the *conflict* of the book as a widow with no son to care for her and her daughter-in-law, or to carry on the family line. At the heart of the *resolution* is Boaz, a figure who shows a lot of similarities to David's greatest son, Jesus.

There are many reasons to study *Ruth*. As Tony Merida helpfully outlines in the introduction to his study guide:

- First, *we get to see the larger story of God's redeeming grace*. The book of *Ruth* advances the story of God's redeeming grace to Adam's fallen race, and it magnifies God's *hesed* – his covenantal faithfulness and unceasing kindness.
- Second, *we gain a greater appreciation of God's providence*. God is present in the lives of these seemingly insignificant characters, displaying his meticulous providence, just as he is at work in our own lives.
- Third, *we're reminded of God's global mercy*. The gospel is not just for the Jew only, but for the whole world, including Moabites like Ruth.

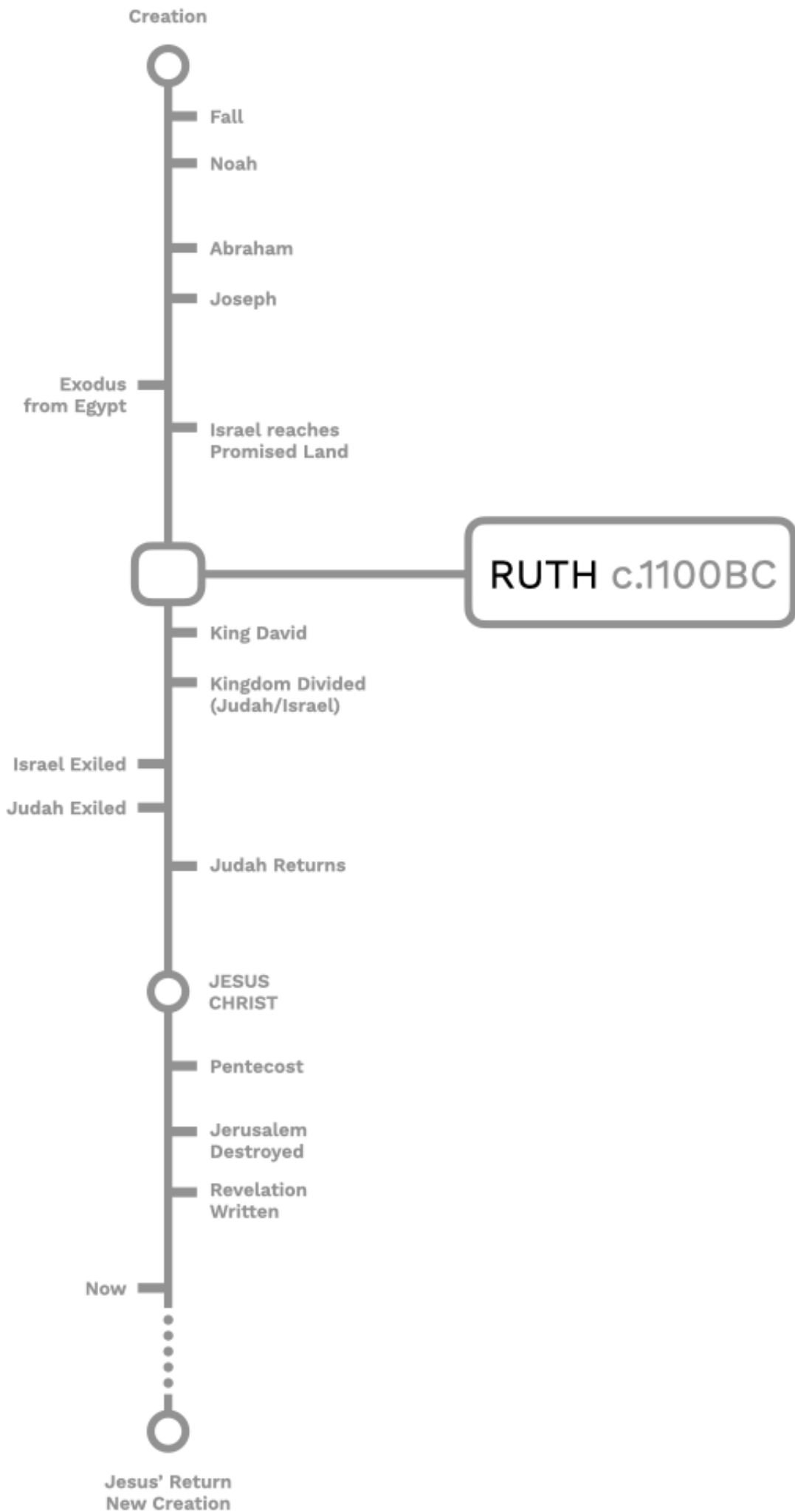
- Fourth, we see *models of genuine godliness*. Ruth inspires us to be loyal, sincere, gracious, courageous, and devoted. Boaz gives us a model of manhood: justice-pursuing and not passive, compassionate and not abusive. Naomi's story reminds us of the place of grief, and it engenders hope in us as she goes from emptiness to fullness in the narrative.

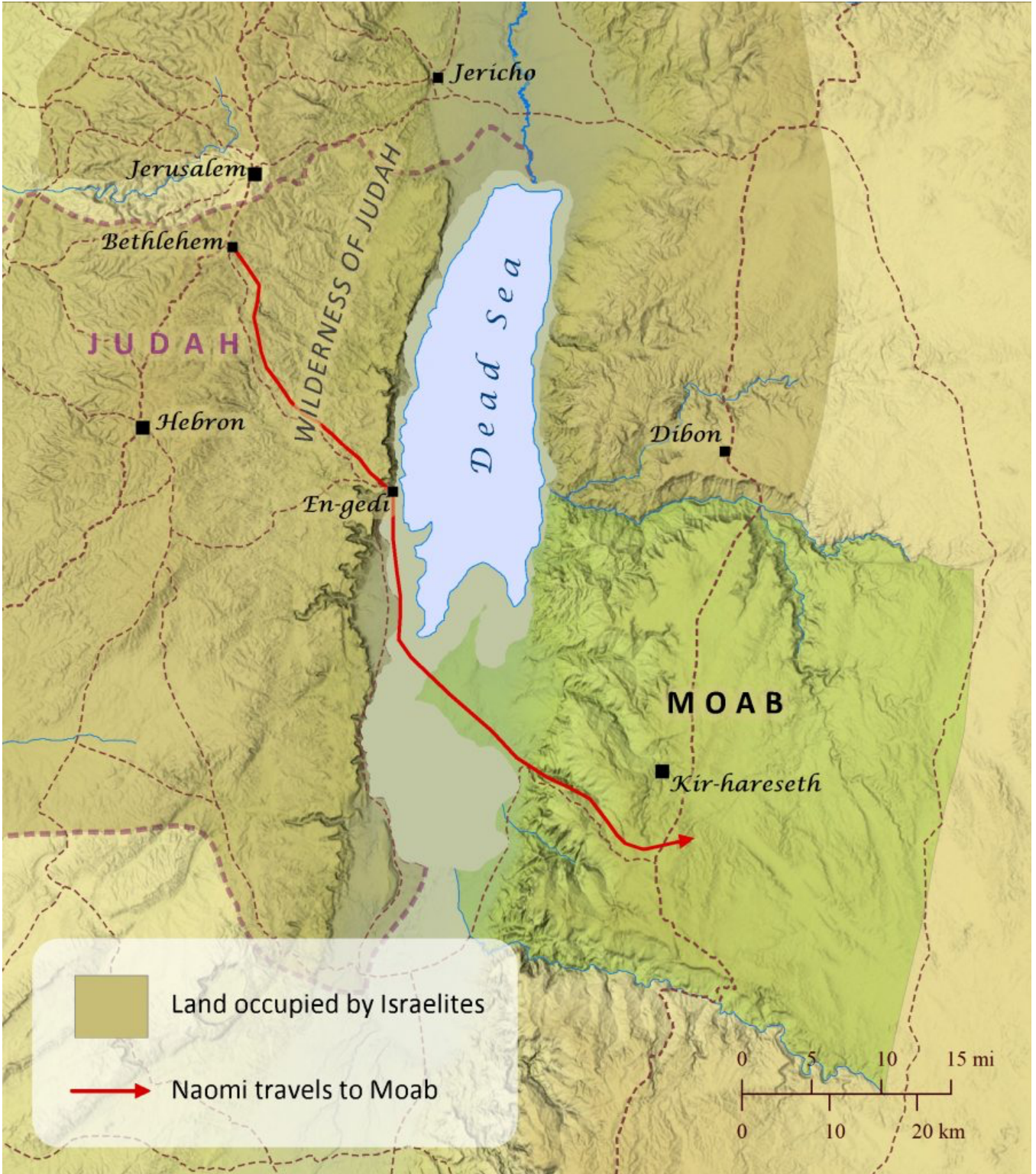
Ultimately, *Ruth* points very directly to the coming Messiah. We see this in the theme of redemption and its theological trajectory into the New Testament. And we see this very clearly at the end of the book, when we find out that Ruth's descendants will be kings of Israel – that Ruth is part of the royal line that eventually leads to Jesus (Matthew 1:5–17).

How to Use These Studies

Like all of our studies, these follow a general pattern of establishing context, observing what's in the passage, discussing the meaning of that content, then relating / applying that truth to our lives. Some things to remember (whether leaders or not!):

- *Bullets are (mostly) application questions*. From a formatting standpoint, generally a bulleted question will be an application question flowing from the previous 'meaning' question. The final questions are also often application questions.
- *You do not have to do every question*. Indeed, you don't have to do any of the questions! This is designed as a guide, and since every group is different, what works in one group may not work in another.
- *Read the Passage*. Study-wise, most passages are broken into sections. However, it is a good idea to read the entire passage first, in order to get a sense of the whole and the flow, then look closely at the sections (this is especially helpful in a narrative like *Ruth* which contains clearly delineated episodes).





1 FAMINE IN THE HOUSE OF BREAD

Ruth Chapter 1

As mentioned in the Series Overview – and made clear in the very first verse of the book – the story of Ruth takes place ‘During the time of the judges’ (probably from c.1380 to c.1050 B.C.). This is pre-monarchy, and the last verse of the book of *Judges* is a sobering context-setter for *Ruth*: ‘In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did whatever he wanted.’ (Judges 21:25). It is also worth noting the enmity between Israel and Moab going back to the conquest. The events of *Ruth* suggest a time when tensions were less heightened. Nonetheless, the underlying hostility and suspicion between the two countries was ever present.

READ | Ruth 1:1–2

1. We’re told this story is set ‘During the time of the judges’. What do you know about this time period?
2. List the details of the characters to whom we’re introduced in the opening verses and their relationship to one another.
3. Where does Elimelech and his family go? What do you know about this land/people? (cf. Gen 19:36–37; Deut 2:9, 23:3). Do you think this is a wise decision? Why/why not?

- When you face a difficult life decision, how do you decide what to do? What factors do you take into account/who influences you? What place does God's word have?

Names have important meanings in the Old Testament, and here they highlight themes and ironies in the narrative of *Ruth*. For instance, *Bethlehem* means 'House of Bread', which is ironic given that there is a no bread at this time (due to famine). *Naomi* means 'delightful' or 'pleasant' (which at times is both tragically ironic yet prophetic). The name *Ruth*, while not being originally a Jewish name, sounds similar to the Hebrew for 'friendship' (a quality very much part of Ruth's character). And *Elimelech* means 'God is king'. This has thematic resonance, as God's sovereignty is seen throughout the story. It is also ironic: by abruptly moving his whole family to a foreign (and largely unfriendly) land, Elimelech acts somewhat as his own king.

READ | Ruth 1:3–5

4. Summarise what happens to the family.
5. The story of Elimelech's family has become tragic – ironically so. What are some of the ironies in this story so far (consider what Elimelech was *trying* to do by moving and what ended up *happening*)?
 - Put yourself in Naomi's shoes for a moment: how would you be feeling? What would you do?

- What do we learn about trying to control the future? About our decisions?

READ | Ruth 1:6–18

6. Up to this point Naomi's story is one of tragedy and suffering. What hint of a better future comes in v.6, and what is Naomi's response?
7. What reasons does Naomi give for her daughters-in-law to return to their home country (vv.8–13)?
8. Initially, both women want to stay with Naomi (v.10). Eventually, Orpah is persuaded to return to Moab – but Ruth insists on staying with Naomi.

Consider her reply to Naomi in vv.16–17: what is the core statement Ruth is making here? What is she committing herself to?

Ruth's pledge to Naomi and to her God reveals that she has counted the cost of following the LORD, and has committed herself to doing what it takes. This goes to the heart of faith, and it is no surprise that generations later Jesus used the same language of 'cost counting' to speak of following him (Luke 14:25–30).

- Fellowship with God and his people over her blood family was precious to Ruth. Where have you found that?
- What does this teach us about our priorities in life?

- What is the cost of following the Lord/being a Christian that you personally find the hardest?

READ | Ruth 1:19–22

9. The response of the people of Bethlehem to Naomi's return is a joyous one (v.19). What is Naomi's response? What does she say about herself – and God (vv.20–21)?
10. Do you think that Naomi's accusations against God are valid? Why/why not?
11. What sign of God's grace appears right at the end of chapter 1 (v.22)?

FINAL THOUGHTS AND APPLICATION

12. What might Ruth chapter 1 teach us about God and our decisions and relationship to him?
13. Like Naomi, we may want to call ourselves 'Mara' at times.
 - When we feel this way, how can we remind ourselves of the Lord's grace?
 - What words of comfort would you offer to a fellow believer who is thinking of giving up on God because of a bad situation? How would you deliver that message?

2 THE UNSEEN HAND OF GOD

Ruth Chapter 2

The first chapter of Ruth dealt primarily with three women. Ultimately it focussed on just two: Naomi, who has lost her husband and her two sons, and Ruth, Naomi's widowed daughter-in-law, who has made a strong commitment to Naomi – and, most significantly, her God (1:16–17). Despite the tragedy faced by these women, and Naomi's bitterness, their return coincided with the beginning of the harvest season – a sign of God's grace in the midst of their difficult circumstances. In chapter 2 we meet Boaz. From his introduction in verse 1 it is as if the author is saying, *Keep your eye on this guy!*

READ | Ruth 2:1–3

1. Here we are introduced to the character of Boaz. What do we know about him from these verses?
2. What do you think it means that Boaz was 'a prominent man of noble character'?
3. What does Ruth do for work (cf. Lev 19:9–10 and Deut 24:19)? What does this tell us about Naomi and Ruth's financial position?
4. Consider where Ruth ends up (v.3b). What is the author trying to tell us?

- How do we (or *don't* we) look after the poor or immigrant in our country?
- What do you think of 'luck' or 'coincidence'? What should we make of it as Christians?

READ | Ruth 2:4–17

5. Boaz arrives on the scene in v.4. What are your first thoughts of him? What additional information do these verses reveal about him?
6. What is Ruth's initial reaction to Boaz (v.10)? How does this change (cf. v.14)?
7. Consider Boaz's prayer in v.12. What is ironic about it? What does this reveal about the way God often works?
 - What aspects of Boaz's and Ruth's character do you find compelling?
 - Boaz recognised that Ruth was under the protection of the LORD. But he also recognised that he would become part of the answer to his own prayer (i.e. Ruth would be blessed by God through him).

Can you think of the ways in which you might be the answer to your own prayers?

READ | Ruth 2:18–23

8. What does Ruth do with the leftover food from Boaz's meal?

- What does this show us about how we ought to respond to generosity (specifically, God's generosity)?

9. How would you summarise Naomi's reactions:

- to Ruth's experience?
- to the LORD (compare this with the end of chapter 1)?

The 'Family-Redeemer'

Redemption – the act of regaining something (possession, status) often in exchange for a price – is a key concept in Ruth. In Israelite tradition and law, the *family-redeemer* (or *kinsman-redeemer*) was responsible for protecting the interests of needy members of the extended family, such as to provide an heir for a brother who had died or redeem land that a poor relative had sold outside the family (cf. Lev 25:37–49; Deut 25:5-10).

10. What does it mean that Boaz is a family-redeemer to Naomi's family?

11. Consider the spiritual dimension of these concepts: in what ways does the New Testament say we are like Ruth and Jesus is like Boaz (cf. John 8:30–36)?

3 A BOLD PROPOSAL

Ruth Chapter 3

In *Ruth* chapter 2, we met a good man: Boaz. He was described as ‘a prominent man of noble character’ (2:1) – a man of *substance*, both materially and morally. He is single, a man of mercy and justice, and a potential ‘family redeemer’. He has lavished kindness on Ruth and her mother-in-law, and Naomi recognises that he could be a redeemer for them by marrying Ruth. But chapter 2 leaves us hanging. We are left to wonder: will anything happen between these two?

READ | Ruth 3:1–6

1. What is Naomi’s concern in this opening section?
2. Summarise Naomi’s plan for Ruth (and Boaz). What do you think Naomi is expecting or hoping to happen? What are some potential outcomes (positive and negative)?
3. How does Ruth respond to Naomi’s plan? What does this show about Ruth – and about her and Naomi’s view of Boaz?
4. Naomi could have just said ‘God is sovereign, so let’s just wait until a husband knocks on the door’. Why do you think she didn’t do that?

- How does Naomi's plan, and Ruth's response to it, fit with/challenge your understanding of the relationship between God's sovereignty and human activity?

READ | Ruth 3:6–18

5. How does Ruth approach Boaz?

- What do you understand/think is the significance behind uncovering Boaz's feet and lying beside him?

- What is Boaz's immediate response?

It's important to note that, though undoubtedly 'forward', Naomi's plan and Ruth's actions do not throw into doubt their moral integrity (cf. v.11 R.E. Ruth's character). Naomi's advice to Ruth is clearly for the purpose of appealing to Boaz's kinsman obligation. While there are sexual overtones present in the action of woman uncovering a man's legs in the dark and lying next to him, there is nothing beyond that to suggest that this act was anything but a nonverbal, apparently customary means of requesting marriage. This is reinforced by Naomi's final instruction: *He will tell you what to do* (v.4).

6. How is what Ruth says here different to Naomi's plan? What does this reveal about Ruth?

7. Consider Ruth's words in v.9 ('spread your cloak'). What is she asking Boaz? (cf. the LORD's use of the expression in Ezekiel 16:8)

'Spread your cloak' could also be translated 'spread your *wings*' and have the more general idiomatic meaning of 'protection' and 'blessing'. With this in mind, it is interesting to consider Ruth's words in light of Boaz's prayer in 2:12 – that Ruth may be blessed by the LORD, 'under whose *wings* you have come for refuge'. Once again we see ironies in the narrative and how they show us God at work – in this case, bringing blessing to his people *through* his people.

8. How does Boaz respond to Ruth's request (vv.10–11)? How does this relate to what we already know of Boaz's character?
9. Boaz agrees to marry Ruth, but there is a potential problem – what is it? (cf. Deut 25:5–10) What is Boaz's response to this possible hitch?
10. Consider Boaz's final actions and instructions as this 'night scene' ends (vv.14–18). What does he send Ruth back with? What kind of man is Boaz pictured as here?

READ | Titus 2:11–14

11. Jesus is called our 'redeemer'. How is what Jesus has done for us similar to Boaz's intentions for Ruth?

FINAL THOUGHTS AND APPLICATION

- 12.** Where was God in this part of the story? What might this further reveal about the nature of divine–human activity?
- 13.** Naomi and Ruth took a big risk in their plan and actions. In what sense is ‘risk taking’ appropriate for Christians? How do we know whether a ‘risk’ is foolish (e.g. Elimelech moving his family to Moab) or wise?
- 14.** Ruth 3 does not necessarily give us a direct example to follow; indeed, it contains much we cannot imitate – such as threshing-floor marriage proposals! But think again about the actions of Naomi, Ruth and Boaz in this chapter: what *can* we imitate from their example?

4 REDEEMING RUTH

Ruth Chapter 4

Ruth chapter 3 ended with Boaz symbolically accepting Ruth's marriage proposal. But the process of 'redeeming Ruth' (and Naomi) is not straightforward: there another potential family redeemer. Chapter 4 opens with Boaz seeking to resolve the matter of there being a closer relative who may choose to marry Ruth. There is a price to pay – that much is understood. The question is: which man will pay it?

READ | Ruth 4:1–6

1. Where do Boaz and the elders discuss the matter of Naomi and Ruth? What might be a contemporary example of this?

In v.1 we read, 'Soon the family redeemer . . . came by'. The word 'soon' is literally 'and behold'. This phrase not only heightens narrative tension, it also indicates the unseen hand of God at work – as when it's used to describe Boaz showing up at the field (2:4): it was the LORD who brought Boaz there that day, and it is the LORD who brings the other potential redeemer to the city gate while Boaz is waiting for him this day.

2. How does the other 'closer' family redeemer respond to Boaz's initial suggestion (v.4)? What changes in v.6 – and why?

3. How do you feel about the other redeemer? What significance might there be in his remaining unnamed?

- When the other redeemer was given the option of buying land that would bring profit to him and his family, he was keen to do so. But he changed his mind when he heard about marrying Ruth, saying “I can’t redeem it myself, or I will ruin my own inheritance.”

What are some ways we as Christians might be challenged to act in a godly way, even though it costs us financially or personally to do so?

READ | Ruth 4:7–12

4. With the other redeemer unwilling to fulfil his obligations, Boaz is free to redeem Naomi and marry Ruth. How do the two men formalise the deal?

5. Compare the other redeemer with Boaz.

- What do they have in *common*? How are they *different*?
- What would you say the *priorities* are for each man?

A true redeemer is willing to pay a price for the good of others. We see that this is true of Boaz. And we see, in an even more profound and far-reaching way, that this is true of the ultimate Redeemer, Jesus Christ.

READ | Philippians 2:1–11

6. How do verses 1–5 match the character and actions of Boaz?

7. How do verses 6–11 show Jesus acting as our ‘Family Redeemer’?

READ | Ruth 4:13–22

8. As the narrative ends, on whom is the focus?

9. What is the last picture of Naomi in the story of Ruth? What is significant about this picture (cf. 1:21)?

10. What significance does the family tree (vv.18–22) give to Ruth and Boaz’s son?

11. Consider the town’s prayer (v.12) in light of the family tree. In what way does it come true? What does this reveal about God’s plans and purposes and how he achieves them?

FINAL THOUGHTS AND APPLICATION

12.The legal redemption of Naomi and Ruth provides a pattern for Jesus' redemption of us (cf. Rom 3:21–26).

- What is different in Jesus' redemption of us compared with Boaz's redemption of Naomi and Ruth?

- What does this reveal about the nature of God's love for us?

13.The elders acknowledged Boaz's payment for Naomi's estate and rejoice.

- How has God the Father responded to Jesus' sacrifice for the world (cf. Phil 2:9; Eph 1:7)?

- How should we respond to Jesus' redemption of us?

14.Thinking back over the book of Ruth as a whole, how have you been most *challenged* by it? How have you been most *encouraged*?

