

Introduction to Ruth & the Old Testament

“In the days when the judges ruled...” Ruth 1:1a

Sermon Intro

- well, we are starting a new book of the Bible today!
 - any guesses?
 - turn, to the Old Testament
 - the 8th book of the Bible, the book of RUTH!
 - a cool way to spend Mother’s Day, beginning a book about some godly Mothers
 - in a real sense - Naomi and Ruth - are your spiritual mothers
- Ruth Series
 - this is such an incredible book, so many important biblical themes and truths in it
 - so we’re going to savor this little book of Ruth, take our time in it, glean every bit of goodness we can
 - this will likely get us through most of the summer together
 - I’ll be teaching for the next few weeks, then my wife and I are expecting a baby girl in June
 - the elders have graciously given me 4 Sundays off to be with my new baby and family
 - Travis as well as a few guests will also be in this series with us
- this is only the second time we will have taught through an Old Testament book
 - about 12 years ago, we went through Joshua together (anyone here for that series?)
 - **because of that, this morning, we are going to spend the majority of our time in an introduction to not just Ruth but the Old Testament**
 - you will need your bibles out, ready to flip around
 - I’m personally very excited about our time in God’s Word this morning
 - also want this morning to be an encouragement to those of you who were trying to follow the reading plan
 - we know it’s not an easy thing, especially as we work through the Old Testament which can be so unfamiliar
 - praying that the Spirit will spark your love for the Bible in a fresh way this morning

- so let's read Ruth, chapter 1, verse 1 together (ESV)
 - *read Ruth 1:1, pray*

“In the days when the Judges ruled...” vs 1

- the book of Ruth begins “in the days when the Judges ruled”
 - this was a period of 400 years, after the great Exodus from slavery in Egypt
 - it is 400 years of a spiral into spiritual apostasy, rebellion, chaos, and infighting with the people of God
 - it's tragic.
 - they finally make it to the promised land, and things begin to fall apart

**turn with me back to the book of Judges, chapter 2, verse 7*

- “And the people served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great work that the LORD had done for Israel. And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died at the age of 110 years. And they buried him within the boundaries of his inheritance in Timnath-heres, in the hill country of Ephraim, north of the mountain of Gaash. And all that generation also were gathered to their fathers. **And there arose another generation after them who did not know the LORD or the work that he had done for Israel.** And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD and served the Baals. And they abandoned the LORD, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt. They went after other gods, from among the gods of the peoples who were around them, and bowed down to them. And they provoked the LORD to anger. They abandoned the LORD and served the Baals and the Ashtaroath. So the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he gave them over to plunderers, who plundered them. And he sold them into the hand of their surrounding enemies, so that they could no longer withstand their enemies. Whenever they marched out, the hand of the LORD was against them for harm, as the LORD had warned, and as the LORD had sworn to them. And they were in terrible distress” Joshua 6:6-15
- and so every generation or so, things would get so bad, that the people would repent of their rejection against God, and God would send a judge, a ruler, a deliverer
 - but after the death of this judge, the cycle would repeat itself: rebellion, distress, a judge
 - **this goes on for 400 years**
 - and underneath this cycle, is this spiritual reality, that Israel needs a true leader, a king, one who would truly lead the people back to their God

**flip ahead to Judges 21, to the very last verse in the book*

• “In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes”
Judges 21:25

• and the very next book is Ruth.

• and THE theme of Ruth, is God’s sovereign hand to prepare for such a king, a king after his own heart, David

• *if you will turn quickly to the very last word of the book of Ruth with me - what is that word? **DAVID.***

• and so it is during this terrible season, these 400 years, that the story of Ruth takes place

• and before we get further into this incredible story, we need to pause and notice something obvious

• where is this book of Ruth in your Bible?

• the Old Testament

• now, it’s been a while since we’ve been in the Old Testament together

• and we need to get acquainted with this part of our bibles, and we need to know how we should properly approach reading it and learning from it

many questions arise when we turn to the old Testament:

• ***is it really as important as the New Testament?***

• ***doesn’t it show us a different picture of God?***

• *did God somehow change from the Old Testament to the New Testament?*

• *does it show us a grumpy, vengeful God who is finally shielded by a kind Jesus in the New Testament?*

• ***doesn’t it show us a different way of salvation, one that was finally done away with in the New Testament?***

• *and if so, why bother with it?*

• ***do we need to believe that these things really actually happened, or are they just good stories teaching us spiritual truths, but not necessarily actually true?***

- *and if these things happened, what are we to do with the things that seem to contradict science such as evolution, or a flood so big that it covered the whole earth, or the Red Sea parting and bread falling from heaven, or Jonah living in a whale?*
- *so to get us prepared for the book of Ruth together, we have 6 points this morning on the Old Testament and the book of Ruth*
 - I pray and trust these glorious truths will bolster your confidence and love and understanding of the Old Testament

1) Jesus Refers the Old Testament as Scripture

- *if you ever have a question about life, the Bible, or anything, a great place to start is “what does Jesus say about this?”*
 - when it comes to the Old Testament, Jesus called it “The Scriptures”
- if you could walk up to Jesus right now, and say, “Jesus, what’s your favorite story in the Old Testament?”
 - he could say to you, with tongue in cheek: “The what? Oh, you mean the Scriptures! You mean what is my favorite story in the Word of God!”
 - and then he’d tell you his answer
- Jesus viewed all 39 books of the Old Testament as Scripture, as the very word of God
- **Jesus said of the Old Testament:**
 - “...Scripture cannot be broken” John 10:35
 - “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished” Matthew 5:17-18
 - “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God” Matthew 4:4
 - we could go on and on, but the point is that Jesus loved the Old Testament, and viewed it as Scripture, as the very Word of God
- in fact, we know that Jesus viewed literally every book, from Genesis to Malachi as the Word of God, as Scripture
 - in Luke 11, Jesus was calling out the Jews for not believing the Word of God

- to understand this, need to know that Jesus' Bible had the same 39 books in it, but ordered slightly differently. Ended with 2 Chronicles, not Malachi, but the content is the same.
- and in what seems like an off-hand comment, we see Jesus refer to every book of your Old Testament as the Word of God
 - “Therefore also the Wisdom of God said, ‘I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and persecute,’ so that the blood of all the prophets, shed from the foundation of the world, may be charged against this generation, **from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah**, who perished between the altar and the sanctuary. Yes, I tell you, it will be required of this generation” Luke 11:49-51
 - when Jesus said from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, he refers to the first book of the Jewish bible, to the very last book
- **Jesus declared that the 39 books of the Old Testament, sitting in your lap, 76% of your Bible, are the very Word of God to you**

**it wasn't just Jesus. Our second point is this:*

2) The Rest of the New Testament Refers to the Old Testament as Scripture

- “But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it, and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work” 2 Timothy 3:14-17
 - Paul is talking about the Old Testament!
 - the Old Testament !!! is breathed out by God, and profitable for your life, to teach you, to call you out when you're astray, to correct you, and to train you
 - now, we could spend so much time on this verse
 - but you need to understand one critical concept taught here
- “breathed out by God”, or “inspired”
 - hear me: the ultimate author of the Bible is God.
- “but it was written by people over thousands of years, to specific contexts” you say to me
 - yes, you are correct.

- it was written by an estimated 35 authors, over a period of 3500 years
- but hear me: this is no ordinary book, and these were no ordinary authors
 - as we just read, All of Scripture is “breathed out by God”
 - Peter puts it another way
 - “knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” 1 Peter 1:20-21
- so which is it?
 - Let me ask you this: was Jesus fully God or fully man?
 - both
 - Is God sovereign or are people held responsible for their actions
 - both
- It is the same with the Bible: God authored the Bible, through a multitude of authors, over many years - to give us what we have today: The Bible, The Word of God
 - stained glass metaphor
 - imagine we had an old church building
 - sitting here, the sun beautifully shining in through the stained glass, and the light coming through beautifully colored
 - now - outside the window, is pure sunlight
 - but it comes to us, through stained & cut glass - each piece of which is uniquely designed to do something unique with the light coming through it - and these stains and cuts do not distort the light, but do what the craftsman intended
 - so the Word of God comes like pure sunlight, and passes through uniquely designed and placed individuals, to communicate exactly what God the artist intends
 - it is truly the Word of God, and even those personalities and places and times in history were designed by God - and through them God gives us his Word, in a beautiful variety
- the Bible in your hands is a truly indescribable miracle and work of God by the God of the universe

3) The Old Testament Really Happened

- since the rise of liberal Christianity about 200 years ago, people have questioned if the stories in the Old Testament actually happened
 - and many even say that it isn't necessary that these things happened for them to still be significant for us
 - things like God creating the World in Genesis 1 & 2, to the people in the early chapters like Adam and Eve and Cain and Abel, to Noah and the flood, to Jonah being swallowed by a whale
 - scholars say things like "well you know it's a lovely story, but it's fiction"
 - we are told that these stories are more likely parables and poetry, not actual history
 - we are told they didn't need to really have happened for us to learn from them
 - that way we Christians don't need to look strange to our modern secular scientific society: because we all know snakes don't talk, we all know humans can't ride inside whales, and people don't rise from the dead

• what does Jesus say?

- "For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man" Matthew 24:37-39
 - here Jesus is referring to Genesis 7, and the actual activities people engaged in in the days of Noah
 - and he links their existence to the truth that he will come again
 - and remember that passage about the blood of Abel to Zachariah?
 - that was blood shed in Genesis 3! Jesus saying that was real blood that was shed!
- "For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here" Matthew 12:40-41
 - sure seems like Jesus said Jonah was really 3 nights in a fish, and it sure seems like that's important for our understanding of the resurrection!
 - and it sure seems like the people of Nineveh are real people, who will really rise up at the judgment!
 - Jesus links his very death on a cross & his resurrection with the historical existence of the people in the book of Jonah!

**we see this elsewhere in the New Testament. For one more example, look at 1 Corinthians 10....*

- here Paul is talking about the Israelites in the Exodus...and in **verse 6**
 - “**Now these things took place** as examples for us, that we might not desire as the did”
- **again verse 11**
 - “**Now these things happened** to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction...”
 - the Bible itself helps us understand how to understand the Bible. And as clear as day, these things happened
 - furthermore - when we forget these things that happend, when we forget the Old Testament - we become like the generation that came after Joshua - they forgot what God had done, and that led them away from the Lord all together!
- **now, how do we know all of the Old Testament happened?**
 - what if some things didn't really happen?
 - with all humility, the Bible helps us know if something is a parable, or just a song
 - we know something is a parable when the Bible says “now he told a parable”
 - for example when the prophet Nathan told a story to King David about an evil man who took a poor man's lamb
 - whenever Jesus would speak a parable, the Bible tells us so
 - when king David writes a poem in the book of Psalms, it tells us - this is a song, it is poetry.
 - And we know that even this poetry is referring to actual events in history in David's life
- **Last point: since when did God loose his ability to be God?**
 - since when was it incredible that God created the universe out of nothing, and Adam and Eve out of dust?
 - since when was it incredible that God could split the Red Sea, or Use a Whale to carry a man, or lead the entire city of Nineveh to repent?
 - since when was it incredible that God would raise his son from the Dead?
 - Church, we believe in a living, powerful God
 - and we believe in his Word
- **we must be humble**
 - while the Bible is perfect, without error, we are not

- we must be humble
- people get things wrong sometimes
- but don't lose your confidence in the Word of God, but in the interpretations of people

**so Jesus viewed the Old Testament as Scripture, the New Testament views it as Scripture, and they all view it as actual history, as true stories.*

4) The Old Testament Reveals the Same God as the New Testament

- isn't God more gnarly in the Old Testament?
 - "For I the LORD do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed" Malachi 3:6
- there is a common misperception of God in the Old Testament
 - in fact, I'd even call it a lie, the lie of the serpent Satan in the garden
 - that God is not good.
 - that God cannot be trusted.
 - that God is holding out on you.
 - that God is keeping you from true joy and life and love and freedom
- one of the wonderful things you will quickly realize when you begin to read the Old Testament, is the surprising and continual love and mercy of God, in spite of people's even more constant rejection of him
- **Malachi 3:6 reveals something astounding**
 - it is because God never changes, that people, the children of Jacob are not consumed
 - this is because God promised to extend mercy and forgiveness to the sons of Jacob, his people
 - and because God is gracious and forgiving, even when his children struggle to obey him and continue to sin, he does not change his mind about forgiving them
- but we need a complete picture of God, and so look at the verse that comes before Malachi 3:6
 - "Then I will draw near to you for judgment. I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, against the adulterers, against those who swear falsely, against those who oppress the hired

worker in his wages, the widow and the fatherless, against those who thrust aside the sojourner, and do not fear me, says the LORD of hosts” Malachi 3:5

- we all like the forgiving God, but we have a difficult time with a holy God
- the Old Testament, along with the New shows us a God who is both holy, and compassionate
 - he is absolutely holy, and so he will always deal with evil and sin
 - and he is absolutely loving, so he sent his son, that whoever would repent of their sin and trust in Jesus - would not perish but receive forgiveness
- the lie is that God is gnarly in the Ot, God is nice in the NT
 - both are not true
 - God has always been compassionate and forgiving, even in the Old Testament
 - and God has always been holy and punishes sin, even in the New Testament
 - bear with me for this silly picture: but it's like God is the sun, who is radiant and beautiful and glorious
 - but you'd never want to fly a spaceship into the sun, you'd perish
 - but the gospel is like Jesus coming, saying, hey, jump in my spaceship that can withstand the heat of the sun, and let's go explore the sun together
 - and so, because of Christ, we can get absolutely close, in fact brought into the very center of the sun, and though it remains the sun, we are safe in Christ

**now, I want to briefly address a difficulty that often arises when people think about the Old Testament:*

- *What about God wiping out entire people groups as in the story of Noah, or the conquest of Canaan*
 - **1) all of humanity has sinned. and in that sin, we all deserve death, and divine justice.**
 - the fact that people continue to breath and live is mercy
 - **2) the judgment we see in the flood, and in the book of Joshua isn't "generally" just, it is specifically just**
 - in both of those stories, we read specifically of the wickedness of those groups of people
 - “The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. ...So the LORD said, “I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens, for I am sorry that I have made them.” Genesis 6:5, 7

- and for the conquest of Canaan, we read verses such as this
 - “And they shall come back here in the fourth generation, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.” Genesis 15:16
 - it is certainly not right to dispossess people of their land. But God sees the future in which 400 years of sin has cumulated to such a point that it will warrant judgment, and at that very moment - Joshua and his armies arrive
 - “Not because of your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart are you going in to possess their land, but because of the wickedness of these nations the LORD your God is driving them out from before you, and that he may confirm the word that the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob” Deuteronomy 9:5
- these are difficult passages for us, and yet entirely representative of a Holy God.
 - the incredible reality is, that we too, our nation, our city, even us in this room - apart from the mercy and patience of God, deserve this kind of judgment
 - and as Jesus tells us, unless people repent, they will receive this kind of judgment
 - **yet the world is living under the patience and mercy of God, even now, as he is providing time for the gospel of Jesus to go forth and for people to repent**
 - “The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed” 2 Peter 3:10
- the last thing to mention here, is while we do read of such judgment in the Old Testament, it is the continual mercy and patience of God that stands out far brighter
 - that he would spare Adam and Eve after their sin, and cover their shame
 - that he would graciously chose Noah and spare his family and humanity
 - that he would rescue Israel out of Egypt and bring them to the promised land
 - that he would continue to be patient with his people generation after generation as they would abandon him for false gods and sin
 - that he would promise a Messiah, and we would see him working to bring this messiah about, even in stories such as Ruth
- truly Nehemiah was right when he testified of his forefathers:
 - “They refused to obey and were not mindful of the wonders that you performed among them, but they stiffened their neck and appointed a leader to return to their slavery in Egypt. But you are a God ready to forgive, gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and did not forsake them” Nehemiah 9:17

**which brings us to the next point*

- *we've seen that Jesus viewed the Old Testament as Scripture*
- *the New Testament views it as Scripture*
- *they all view it as actual history*
- *God is the same God in both Testaments*

**next, we see this: this will be very surprising to many of you, but it is absolutely essential to understand it*

5) The Old Testament Reveals the Same Way of Salvation

- did you know that the Old Testament is filled with picture after picture of salvation
 - and while the pictures are many - it's always boils down to the same thing
 - we are saved by trusting in the grace of God
- those in the Old Testament didn't know the full story, they didn't know about Jesus
 - but they trusted in God's promises to forgive and to save
 - Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness
 - Israel in bondage believed God, and so put blood over their doors the night of Passover, and were rescued from death and delivered out of Egypt
 - Israel in believed God, and so participated in the sacrificial system - displaying God's forgiveness
- we can often think that people were saved by works in the Old Testament, but now people are saved by grace
 - but this is not so
 - people were always saved by the grace of God
 - Hebrews tells us that the blood of goats and bulls never took away sin
 - they were simply acts of faith - trusting that God would remove their sin
- and in an incredible and even mind bending way - even the saints in the Old Testament were saved by the blood of Jesus
 - even the sin of those in the Old Testament were placed upon Jesus on the cross

- they didn't know how God would do it, but they knew God could do it, and so they trusted in his grace
- and the Old Testament is replete with prophecies that one day God would take away the sins of the world in a single day, through a single sacrifice, through the work of the messiah
- and so, we can read the Old Testament, and identify with the people of God there, who were saved just as we were
 - Tim Keller, in quoting one of his favorite Bible teachers, said we Christians can identify with the Old Testament saints in this way:
 - “We were in a foreign land, in bondage, under the sentence of death. But our mediator - the one who stands between us and God - came to us with the promise of deliverance. We trusted in the promises of God, took shelter under the blood of the lamb, and he led us out. Now we are on the way to the Promised Land. We are not there yet, of course, but we have the law to guide us, and through blood sacrifice we also have his presence in our midst. So he will stay with us until we get to our true country, our everlasting home” (Tim Keller quoting Alec Motyer)

**so we've seen:*

- *Jesus viewed the Old Testament as Scripture*
- *the New Testament views it as Scripture*
- *they all view it as history*
- *God is the same God in both Testaments*
- *The way of salvation is the same in both Testaments*

**and now, finally, we see this*

6) The Old Testament (and therefore Ruth) is all about Jesus

- the Old Testament doesn't just show us the same way of salvation...
 - the Old Testament is all a preparation for the person of Jesus
- “...from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus” 2 Timothy 3:15
 - Paul is telling Timothy here, that the Old Testament is able to make him wise for salvation in Jesus

Whole Bible Summary

- OT preparing for Jesus

- Gospels displaying Jesus
- New Testament explaining and anticipating Jesus
- in the days after his resurrection, Jesus appeared to two disciples in Luke 24 on the road to Emmaus
 - and he gave them the greatest Bible study ever written
 - “And he said to them, “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?” And beginning with **Moses** and **all the Prophets**, he interpreted to them in **all the Scriptures** the things concerning himself” Luke 24:25-27
 - if **ONLY** we could only go through every book of the Bible and show how it points to Jesus, his cross and resurrection
 - because Jesus himself shows us, that from Genesis to Malachi, it is all about him

- which brings us back to Ruth

- as it begins with the phrase: “in the time of the Judges...”
 - as the nation was reeling, without a King, without God...
 - the Holy Spirit gives us this story of Ruth
- turn with me to the end of the book of Ruth
 - sorry, going to spoil it, but read with me the last verses of this beautiful story:
 - “So Boaz took Ruth, and she became his wife. And he went in to her, and the LORD gave her conception, and she bore a son. Then the women said to Naomi, ‘Blessed be the LORD, who has not left you this day without a redeemer, and may his name be renowned in Israel! He shall be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age, for your daughter-in-law who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons, has given birth to him. Then Naomi took the child and laid him on her lap and became his nurse. And the women of the neighborhood gave him a name, saying, ‘A son has been born to Naomi’. They named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David” Ruth 4:13-17
- **through all of the national drama in Judges, and through all the personal drama of Ruth and her family, God sovereignly orchestrated the birth of the heir to the great king David, and to the King of Kings, Jesus**
- ***the way Ruth’s life and story goes, is the way every life and story goes***

- God is at work
- **in every minuscule detail, every tragedy, every unexpected circumstance, to ultimately bring glory to the name of Jesus**
- it is important we remember that the great end to the story of Ruth is not that she gets another husband and a child and lives happily ever after
 - the great end to the story of Ruth is that her son would have a son, who would have another son, who eventually would become Jesus
 - the one who brings meaning to her life and suffering
- from the start of this book of Ruth, we must remember the point - Jesus
 - **and we must learn how to view our stories the same way**
 - there will be tragedy and unexpected set backs
 - listen - some of our stories will end more like the husband and sons of Naomi
 - we have lived enough life to know that on this earth, every story doesn't end like a Disney movie
- but the book of Ruth, and the whole story of the Bible tells us this:
 - it will all make sense one day, when it ends in Jesus
 - it all leads to Jesus. Our suffering and sorrows and stories find their significance in being brought in to the great story of Jesus
- **practical**
 - don't be surprised when your life looks like those we see in the story of Ruth
 - don't judge your circumstances too soon
 - there will be seasons when things don't make sense, and you won't know what God is up to
 - but in it all - you can trust God is at work in every circumstance to bring glory to Jesus, and to make you more like Jesus
 - you can trust him
 - he is good
 - he is at work in your life

Prayer

Call to Worship - prayer team (bring your questions), **communion** - it ends with Jesus blood