A STUDY IN RUTH

How to approach studying the Bible

1. *Read the text: Establish author, audience and context (completed)*
2. Read the text: Identify the message being communicated
3. Identify questions that you want to have answered: Use resources to find answers.
4. Read the text: Identify the message being communicated
5. Map the audience & message: Apply the message to your life
6. Compare your conclusions with others: Trace back any differences to the text

Understanding Chapter 1

Objective: Identify the message of Ruth Chapter 1 and apply it as God's word spoken into our lives.

Step Two: Read the chapter and identify the message the author is communicating to the audience.

Since I don't have a clear picture of the Author or the Audience, I will focus on what is happening in the story and in the lives of the characters.

Naomi's descent into despair:

1. Her family is driven from their ancestral home by famine and moves to Moab
2. Her husband dies and she is left under the care of her sons
3. Her sons die and she is left without support
4. The Lord visited His people and gave them food (back in Bethlehem)
5. Naomi decides to return to her husband's community and clan
6. She has a tearful farewell with her daughters in law, and Orpah leaves her to stay in Moab
7. Ruth clings to her and refuses to abandon her
8. When they return to Bethlehem, Naomi's misfortune puts the town in an uproar.

Naomi's Attitude:

- She is isolated by the death of her husband and sons but is also isolating by trying to send her daughters in law away (3x).
- She takes no joy from Ruth's faithfulness
- She is bitter because of the circumstances of her life

Naomi's Spiritual state

Naomi blames God for her condition and claims that God has brought calamity into her life

- The hand of the Lord has gone out against me (13)
- The Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me (20)
- The Lord has brought me back empty (21)
- The Lord has testified against me (21)

- The Almighty has brought calamity upon me (21)

Naomi is spiritually aware, but her spirituality has been consumed by bitterness toward God for what has happened to her.

This is in marked contrast to Job who had similar kinds of loss but refused to blame God for his circumstances.

Step Three: Identify and write down any questions that arise out of the chapter.

Use resources to research and answer the questions you've written down.

What does "Sojourn" mean?

- [BLB] to sojourn, abide, dwell in, dwell with, remain, inhabit, be a stranger, be continuing, surely
  - to sojourn, dwell for a time
  - to abide, stay, temporarily dwell
- Based on the above, this suggests that it means less about traveling and more about staying in a place but not being of the place. Being a foreigner who lives among the natives.

Is there any significance to the names of the husband or sons?

- [Unger's]
  - Elimelech: no meaning given
  - Chilion, husband of Orpah: pining
  - Mahlon, husband of Ruth: sickly
  - Orpah: neck
  - Ruth: a female friend
  - Naomi: pleasant, delight
  - Mara: bitter

What is Ruth's reason for staying with Naomi?

- I could not find any sources to answer this question.
- Naomi's exhortation to return to her mother and get remarried and have a family seems very practical. However, Ruth's declaration transfers her allegiance from her biological family to Naomi and her people. So, in some respects, Ruth follows Naomi's advice to return to her mother – only it's not the mother that Naomi expected.
- Ruth must have seen or known something that gave her hope in Bethlehem among the people of God. It could have been a turning away from her people and Chemosh, their god. It could have been a sense that Jehovah was better because of how He had intervened in the famine. It could have been an act of faith that Jehovah was the true God and she wanted to be adopted into His people.
- What motivated Ruth is not given explicitly in the text, so it may not be possible to infer it.

What does it mean that the town of Bethlehem was "stirred"?

- [BLB] Using the interlinear lookup of the Hebrew word, it means "make a (great) noise, murmur, roar". Obviously, this was "news" in Bethlehem. Perhaps this was the first the town had heard about Elimelech's death and the death of his heirs – putting his inheritance into jeopardy. We also see the women being stirred up, likely out of sympathy for Naomi, who had lost everything in the time that she was gone.

What is the time of the barley harvest?

- [Unger's] "The barley harvest is earlier than the wheat harvest, and begins in April in the Jordan valley, and continues to be later as the altitude increases, until, at a height of six thousand feet above the sea, it takes place in July and August." As Bethlehem sits up in the Judean hills around 2,500 feet, the barley harvest could have been in May or June.

Step Four: Read the chapter and refine the message the author is communicating to the audience

(now that your questions are answered)

Naomi's Circumstances

- Naomi had been forced from her home by famine
- Her husband and both her sons were dead
- Only one daughter in law remained with her
- She was returning to her in-laws older, poorer and more helpless than when she left

Without redemption, Naomi had no hope and no future.

Naomi's Response

- The hand of the Lord has gone out against me (13)
- The Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me (20)
- The Lord has brought me back empty (21)
- The Lord has testified against me (21)
- The Almighty has brought calamity upon me (21)

Naomi Blamed God for her situation and attributed dark intent to Him because of her own dark, bitter spirit.

Ruth's Contrast

Despite Ruth being in the same situation as Naomi, she reacts in the exact opposite manner

- She clings to Naomi rather than returning to the more certain future in Moab

- She embraces God rather than blaming Him
- Ruth sees goodness and attraction where Naomi sees hopelessness and calamity

Step Five part 1: Map the Audience (review & revise)

(how much and in what ways is the audience like us today?)

Culturally and historically Ruth and Naomi are very different from me today. The same is true for their practice of religion and faith. They were under the Law and bound to temporary coverings for their sin while they looked forward to a future Redeemer who could bring a more permanent solution.

Circumstantially (in the story), however, they are very similar to me today. They have come to the place where they are helpless to save themselves and can only find hope if a redeemer intervenes on their behalf. If that doesn't happen, all is lost. This is very similar to the spiritual condition of people today: Helpless and unable to provide salvation for themselves without a Redeemer to do what they could not.

Since the story is focusing on their circumstances, which is the part that is most like me, I want to apply the picture the story is painting as a close approximation to me and therefore apply it very directly.

Step Five part 2: Map the message to apply to me today

- What commands must I obey?
- What truth must I hold dear?
- What error must I flee?
- How is God revealed?
- How is the gospel made clear?

God is portrayed in 2 ways:

- Mercifully intervening in the lives of His people to bring food back and end the famine.
- Through Naomi's eyes as harsh and punishing her by bringing such terrible circumstances into her life.

This is a matter of perspective. Naomi's perspective is twisted by her own bitter attitude. This same attitude can impact me today, and I see here the darkness to which it leads. This is a warning for me to project my own circumstances on God.

Naomi's view of God was entirely backward looking – she had no perspective of why He was doing it or what He had planned for her future.

The Gospel is portrayed through the bad news before the good news. We see in Naomi a picture of hopelessness that comes before we turn to God. Naomi's inability to change her circumstances is directly relatable to our spiritual state while we are dead in sin.

- What actions can I take in the next 7 days that will demonstrate what I said above is real?

This passage is a clarion call to check my attitude. Do I start from faith (like Ruth?) of start from circumstances (like Naomi?)?

Step Six: Compare your conclusions

Share your study results with a study buddy or compare it to a commentary to see how others have understood the passage.