

Defining Love Ruth 1

We live in a culture where people claim very much to adhere to the concept of love. Love is still the number one subject of popular songs. People still watch movies and TV shows that are love stories.

Despite all the professed “love for love” that is in the world, we have a great lack of understanding for what love actually is. Think about all the ways that love is cheapened by the way people speak about it.

“I feel nothing but love for everybody.”

“I have love for (fill in the blank of person you have never met and will never meet and will never have any meaningful impact on their lives whatsoever).”

“They fell in love.”

“They fell out of love.”

“Love yourself first.”

“Love is love.”

I’m not saying that all of these sentiments are bad in every context in which they are used. But we also must realize that if everything is “love” then nothing is love. We need a strong knowledge of the Scriptures so that we can have a concrete definition of what love is. Only when we know what love is can we begin to know whether or not we possess it.

The book of Ruth is a short story in the writings section of the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament). Taken on its face, this is a very well-written and compelling love story about how two people found romance and an entire family was redeemed as a result.

But there is added element to this love story about a family when you realize which family this story is about. All the way back in Genesis 49, Jacob gathered his twelve sons around him to receive a blessing at the very end of his life. The blessing Jacob gives to the fourth son, Judah, becomes one of the definitive storylines of the entire Bible.

Genesis 49:1,8-12

1 Then Jacob called his sons and said, "Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you what shall happen to you in days to come.

8 "Judah, your brothers shall praise you; your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; your father's sons shall bow down before you.

9 Judah is a lion's cub; from the prey, my son, you have gone up. He stooped down; he crouched as a lion and as a lioness; who dares rouse him?

10 The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.

[11](#) Binding his foal to the vine and his donkey's colt to the choice vine, he has washed his garments in wine and his vesture in the blood of grapes.

[12](#) His eyes are darker than wine, and his teeth whiter than milk.

The story of Ruth is ultimately a story of how God loves the world. We will see much more of that in Ruth Chapter 4. But we need to remember all the while that love *originates* with God, therefore we must learn to love from him. The way that he loves goes much deeper than nice thoughts. His love is characterized by covenants, plans, and actions. We begin to see these elements of love in the story of Ruth and Naomi.

Ruth 1

[1](#) In the days when the judges ruled there was a famine in the land, and a man of Bethlehem in Judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons.

[2](#) The name of the man was Elimelech and the name of his wife Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah. They went into the country of Moab and remained there.

[3](#) But Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died, and she was left with her two sons.

[4](#) These took Moabite wives; the name of the one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth. They lived there about ten years,

[5](#) and both Mahlon and Chilion died, so that the woman was left without her two sons and her husband.

[6](#) Then she arose with her daughters-in-law to return from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the fields of Moab that the LORD had visited his people and given them food.

[7](#) So she set out from the place where she was with her two daughters-in-law, and they went on the way to return to the land of Judah.

[8](#) But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go, return each of you to her mother's house. May the LORD deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me.

[9](#) The LORD grant that you may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband!" Then she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept.

[10](#) And they said to her, "No, we will return with you to your people."

[11](#) But Naomi said, "Turn back, my daughters; why will you go with me? Have I yet sons in my womb that they may become your husbands?"

[12](#) Turn back, my daughters; go your way, for I am too old to have a husband. If I should say I have hope, even if I should have a husband this night and should bear sons,

[13](#) would you therefore wait till they were grown? Would you therefore refrain from marrying? No, my daughters, for it is exceedingly bitter to me for your sake that the hand of the LORD has gone out against me."

[14](#) Then they lifted up their voices and wept again. And Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her.

[15](#) And she said, "See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law."

16 But Ruth said, "Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God.

17 Where you die I will die, and there will I be buried. May the LORD do so to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you."

18 And when Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more.

19 So the two of them went on until they came to Bethlehem. And when they came to Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them. And the women said, "Is this Naomi?"

20 She said to them, "Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me.

21 I went away full, and the LORD has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi, when the LORD has testified against me and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me?"

22 So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabite her daughter-in-law with her, who returned from the country of Moab. And they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest.

Discussion Questions

- **Why is Naomi bitter?**
- **How have circumstances shaped Naomi's inner life and identity?**
- **Have you ever felt like you were a victim of circumstances?**
- **How do you think it is possible to love as Naomi loved her daughters-in-law even when you have reason to be bitter?**
- **Why is Naomi's relationship with Ruth also tied to both of their relationships with God?**
- **What is Ruth committing to Naomi?**
- **What has Naomi committed to Ruth?**
- **How has our culture lost the connection between love and actual commitment?**
- **In what ways are you demonstrating love through commitment?**
- **How can we show greater love to fellow believers at church by committing to one another?**