

Adult Teaching Resources

November 1, 2015



A Time for Gratitude

You're All I Have — Ruth 1:1-2:23

An Odd Road to a Happy Ending — Ruth 3:1-4:21

Transformational Tears — 1 Samuel 1:1-28

Thanks for the Promises — 2 Samuel 23:1-7

Hope Waits

A Time for Anticipation — 1 Thessalonians 3:6-13

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You're All I Have

Ruth 1:1-2:23

FIT Teaching Guide

by Rick Jordan

This adult teaching outline is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartlege, printed in *Baptists Today*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Baptists Today* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Baptists Today* so they can prepare before the lesson.

Before the Lesson: Cut 10 strips from the “Decisions, Decisions” handout to begin the Information session. Make lyric sheets and prepare an equipment to play the hymn, “God moves in a mysterious way,” for the Transformational Exercise.

Fellowship Question

Use *one* of the following to break the ice, to begin discussion, and lead into the study:

The most recent (like, within the last hour!) decision I made was ...

What was the reason for your most recent move? (job change, nicer neighborhood, etc.)

Information

We begin today's lesson with an exercise about decision-making,

[Distribute the slips of paper. Read the following two paragraphs.]

There are 10 different situations being passed around. List the characters involved and estimate the decision-making power each character has for your particular situation. Then, we will share our answers.

A decision is to be made. Who are the characters involved and how would you divide the percentage of decision-making power each of the characters has? (For example, for “an infant is taken to church,” the characters might be two parents, the child, and a preschool Sunday School teacher. The percentages might be 90%, 0%, and 10%, respectively.)

A family is planning a vacation.

A couple is choosing a retirement community.

A woman is choosing a new hair style.

A senior high school student is choosing a college.

A child is choosing a book to have read to her.

A person is choosing how fast to drive through town.

Information *continued*

A person is deciding how to take vengeance.

A person is deciding between medical procedures.

A person is choosing which car to purchase.

A young person is deciding which friends to have over for an overnight party.

[After class members have shared their answers, say something like...]

How many times did God come into the percentages?

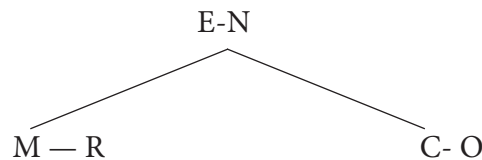
In some persons's theologies, God would get 100%. Everything is predestined. That may not fit any of our theologies, but even if it's not 100%, we would not say it is 0%, either.

In today's Bible lesson, this is one of the questions we will face: Is God in control?

Our lesson comes from the book of Ruth which is about a woman named...Ruth. However, our focus today will be on Ruth's mother-in-law, Naomi.

[Have a class member read Ruth 1:1-5.]

[Draw a family tree on the board:]



So, Elimalech dies [put an X through the E], which is a read hardship for Naomi. But she does have her sons and their family to rely on. But then, her sons, Mahlon and Chilion, also die. [Put Xs through the M and C.] Now, we have three women — three widowed women.

We know that at this time and in this culture, women were very dependent on men for their shelter, their food, their clothing — all of the basics of life, much less any luxuries. Within a short period of time, Naomi has gone from a desperate situation of a famine in the land, to the relief of finding food in a foreign land, to an even more desperate situation of losing her husband and her sons. She cannot feed herself; she certainly cannot support her daughters-in-law.

[Have a class member read Ruth 1:6-22.]

In verse six, we have the first mention of the Lord in this book. What do we hear about the Lord? If one of our situations we read earlier had to do with the weather, such as “A farmer is deciding when to plant his crops based on the weather report,” would we have included God in the mix? We know that the farmer cannot control the weather. But the narrator of Ruth's story is clear that the Lord provided rain and thus food for God's people. Is God in

Information *continued*

control of the weather? Why or why not?

In verses 8-9, Naomi blesses her daughters-in-law. What is her hope for these two women?

On the surface, we might think that the families — or the men of these families — have the responsibility and ability to provide for their returning widows. But Naomi credits God for this security. Is God in control of providing for our basic needs? Why or why not?

In verse 13, Naomi mentions the Lord again. What does she say? What does she say in verses 20-21 about the Lord's role in her situation? Why do you think she would say this?

“It was common in the ancient world for all things, good or bad, to be attributed to divine action. The ‘standard’ covenant theology of the Old Testament, taught in the book of Deuteronomy, is that God blesses the obedient and curses the rebellious.” (From “The Hardest Question: Should Naomi have blamed God for her troubles?”)

Some contemporary persons adhere to this theology — that all things, good or bad, are to be attributed to divine action. Do you agree? What issues, if any, do you have with this theology?

Before we continue with the story of Ruth and Naomi, there is a religious law we will want to have in mind. It has to do with gleaning fields.

[Have a class member read Leviticus 19:9-10 and Deuteronomy 24:19-22.]

What comments would you have to offer about this God and this commandment? What does this say about the character of God? About the compassion of God? About the responsibility of persons who have plenty?

[Have a class member read Ruth 2:1-13.]

Boaz is keeping the law about gleaners. But, he has a special interest in Ruth. Romance is blooming.

What do we read in the text that infers that gleaning in a field could be dangerous for a woman? (v.9, Boaz orders the young men not to bother her.)

We can imagine the vulnerability of a woman in Ruth's situation. Obviously, she is a widow with no man to protect her — or to administer justice for her if she were abused. Even today, there are powerless, voiceless persons in our society. But there are also “Boazes” — persons who use their influence and their voices to provide for and protect the vulnerable. What is our responsibility toward vulnerable persons? Do you know a Boaz? Could you be a Boaz?

[Have a class member read Ruth 2:14-23.]

The last we heard from Naomi, she was feeling very low and was trashing God. “Call me no longer Naomi (“pleasant”) but call me Mara (“bitter”), for the Almighty has dealt bitterly with me.” (1:20) However, with some fresh food in her belly and some food in the cupboard, her tune has changed. Notice that the narrator did not change her name after her

Information *continued*

disparaging remarks — she is still called Naomi throughout the book. What does this say about our spiritual lives?

In 2:19, Naomi blesses *the man* who blessed them with food. When she discovers that the man is Boaz, pieces of a puzzle seem to come together. In verse 20, she blesses *God* “whose kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead.” How has God used others in your life to demonstrate God’s kindness towards you?

Naomi realizes that Boaz is a relative. This will be significant in next week’s lesson. For now, Naomi and Ruth have food and a provider of food. Their initial physical needs are being met, provided by God through Boaz.

Transformational Exercise

We began today’s lesson thinking about choices and how much influence others have in our decision making. We then considered how much influence God has in our decision making.

There are extremes. Some might believe that they are the masters of their fate, they alone have control of their lives. Others may believe that everything is already pre-planned and that we have no say in how our lives are shaped. Others are somewhere between those extremes. God has influence, and so do we. Neither is 100%.

Naomi trusted in God (though it was sometimes a struggle to do so). At the same time, God provided for Naomi through Ruth’s determination, fidelity, and hard work as well as through Boaz’s compassion, generosity, and intriguing interest in Ruth.

God works, but often in mysterious ways. Let’s ponder a hymn with that message. It is an old hymn (1774) written by William Cowper.

[Distribute the lyrics sheet. Play a video of this hymn. This version is a traditional version, with lyrics on the video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6z0e_xSC8to This is a more modern version, which ends with “we are more than conquer” based on Paul’s words in Romans 8:27: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Taq8-Kh6lSs>.]

[Close in a prayer something like this: *God, we believe that you are powerful and that you are influencing the world. We confess that sometimes this is not obvious to us, though. We wonder why we face difficult situations and wonder if you are aware of our situations. Give us the faith to believe that you do care about us and that you are working all things for our good. Amen.*]

Comments or Questions for Rick Jordan? You may send comments to the lesson plan author at rjordan@cbfnc.org. Rick is also available to lead workshops and conferences on Christian Education, with particular emphasis on how best to use the FIT Faith model.

Digging Deeper

by Tony Cartlege

Digging Deeper is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartlege, printed in *Baptists Today*. Watch for the “shovel” icon in the THE BIBLE LESSON, and then reference that item in this Digging Deeper resource. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Baptists Today* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Baptists Today* so they can prepare before the lesson.

The text — The Revised Common Lectionary includes a text from chapter one for this week, and two short texts from chapters three and four the next week. Given that Ruth is such a short book, we’ll be better served by studying the entire first two chapters this week, and the final two chapters next week, so we can get the whole story.

Location, location — From the time of the Latin Vulgate, most Bibles have the book of Ruth appearing between Judges and 1 Samuel because that’s where it would fit in a chronological sense: the opening verse sets the story “in the days when the judges ruled.” By the end of the book, we learn that Ruth became David’s grandmother, so there are grounds for having her story appear before David’s.

Doing this, however, inserts Ruth into the middle of a larger unified narrative. The books of Judges through 2 Kings, with the exception of Ruth, were put together in their current form sometime during the Babylonian exile, in the sixth century BCE. Scholars generally refer to this large block of text as the “Deuteronomistic History,” because it provides a theological interpretation of Israel’s history from the perspective of the covenant theology taught in the book of Deuteronomy. In one way or another, the stories in Joshua through 2 Kings illustrate how the Israelites were individually or collectively blessed when they obeyed Yahweh, and cursed when they didn’t.

The Hebrew Bible takes a different approach. It is composed of three sections: the *Torah* (meaning “Law,” Genesis-Deuteronomy), the *Nevi'im* (meaning “Prophets,” Joshua-Kings plus the writing prophets), and the *Kethubim* (meaning “Writings,” consisting of the poetic and wisdom literature, plus five short books called the *Megillot* [“Scrolls”] and the books of Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah). Ruth is one of the five “scrolls,” appearing with the Song of Songs, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, and Esther. This serves a liturgical purpose, as each of the five scrolls is associated with one of Judaism’s annual celebrations. The book of Ruth is read during *Shavuot*, the harvest festival, because the story is set during the harvest season.

Names — Biblical writers sometimes called characters by names designed to reflect on their character or reputation. The names of Eli’s two sons — Hophni and Phinehas — are first spoken by a visiting prophet who condemned their greedy and immoral behavior (1 Sam. 2:27-36). “Hophni” is an Egyptian word meaning “toad,” and “Phinehas” is Hebrew for “brass lips.” Priests typically gave their sons theophoric names, including a version of God’s name such as “el” or “yah” in them, so it is unlikely that Hophni and Phinehas were their given names.

Digging Deeper *continued*

Likewise, the Deuteronomists refused to call Saul's sons "Ishbaal" and "Mephibaal" by their given names. "Baal" means "lord" and may have been used with reference to God at some point, but by the time 2 Samuel was written, the name Baal was so identified with the Canaanite god Baal that it was considered shameful to have such a name. As such, the writer of 2 Samuel called the two sons "Ishbosheth" and "Mephiboshet," substituting the word for "shame" ("*bosheth*") in the place of Baal. 1 Chronicles 8:33 preserves the original form as "Esh-baal."

In 2012, an archaeological dig led by Yosef Garfinkel at Khirbet Qeiyafa turned up a jug inscribed with the name "Eshbaal, son of Doda." While it is most unlikely that the name refers to Saul's son, it attests to the use of the name among the Israelites from an extrabiblical source.



The Ishbaal Inscription, photo courtesy Tal Rogovsky.

Moab — Moab was not a far country, but located within a one or two day walk: while Bethlehem was located about 18 miles west of the Dead Sea, Moab was located on the southeastern side of the sea. Moabite and Hebrew are both dialects of the same Northwest Semitic language family, so communication would not have been difficult.

Moabite Cousins? — A story in Genesis 19:30-38 traces the ancestry of the Moabites and Ammonites to the daughters of Lot. After fleeing from Sodom, Lot and his daughters were afraid of the surrounding peoples and lived in a cave. The daughters, fearful of having no progeny, got their father drunk so he would impregnate them. They each bore sons, according to the story, and named them Moab and Ammon. The Ammonites lived just east of the Jordan River, while the Moabites were located immediately south of them. The story may seem fanciful, but attests to a Hebrew belief that the Moabites and Ammonites were their distant kin.

Orpah's future? — A later rabbinic tradition claimed that Ruth and Orpah were sisters, both daughters of the Moabite king Eglon (*Ruth Rabbah* 2:9). Another midrash claimed that Orpah became promiscuous after leaving Naomi, and that the giant Goliath was born of an illicit union (BT *Sotah* 42b). Thus, while Ruth became the great-grandmother of David, Orpah was the mother of his nemesis Goliath. Such traditions have nothing to support them beyond the imaginations of the rabbis.

Digging Deeper *continued*

Sexual tension — Boaz’s insistence that he has instructed the young men not to bother Ruth (v. 9), along with Naomi’s insistence that Ruth remain in Boaz’s fields lest other young men molest her (v. 22), introduces a note of sexual tension into the story. Evidently, activities other than harvesting were going on in the fields. In the next chapter, Ruth will visit Boaz in the field in the dead of night, and the tension will become even more palpable.

Sheltering “wings” — Boaz blessed Ruth by saying “May the LORD reward you for your deeds, and may you have a full reward from the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge!” (v. 12). As we will see, though he attributed the protection to Yahweh, it is Boaz whose “wings” will provide protection and shelter to Ruth. The reader may still have this verse in mind in the next chapter, when Ruth visits Boaz in the field and asks him to spread his cloak over her (3:9).

When knowledge meets — The narrator skillfully relates Ruth’s return to Naomi at the end of the day (2:18-23). Naomi’s dark depression lifted when she sees the amount of grain Ruth had collected, and she excitedly asked where Ruth had been. Ruth described the kindness Boaz had shown, but it was Naomi who realized that Boaz, “one of our nearest of kin,” could be the answer to their problems.

One might expect things to move quickly from here, but the narrator retards the action by noting that Ruth continued to glean in the fields of Boaz throughout the barley and wheat harvests — usually a period of about seven weeks — but that she continued to live with her mother-in-law. If any further flirtation transpired between Ruth and Boaz during that time, it must be left to the imagination.

The Hardest Question

by Tony Cartlege

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Should Naomi have blamed God for her troubles?

As the story of Naomi's trials is told, she consistently attributed her misfortunes to God. In 1:13, she told Ruth and Orpah that "the hand of the LORD has turned against me." Upon returning to Bethlehem, she tells the women who recognized her: "Call me no longer Naomi, call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt bitterly with me. I went away full, but the LORD has brought me back empty; why call me Naomi when the LORD has dealt harshly with me, and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me?"

Was Naomi correct? Had God, for some reason, turned against her and caused the death of her husband and sons? Some interpreters have argued just so, suggesting that God caused the death of Elimelech and his two sons because Elimelech showed a lack of faith in God by leaving Judah when times got hard, going to a foreign country rather than trusting in God to provide.

This interpretation has little to support it. Several stories in Genesis report that notables including Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob all left the land of promise for Egypt or other countries during times of famine, and none of them were condemned for it. Indeed, the Joseph story suggests that God intentionally placed Joseph in Egypt to provide food for his brothers and their families when Canaan faced a period of severe famine. Nothing in the legal material suggests that Israelites must prove their faith by remaining in the land during times of drought.

It was common in the ancient world for all things, good or bad, to be attributed to divine action. The "standard" covenant theology of the Old Testament, taught in the book of Deuteronomy, is that God blesses the obedient and curses the rebellious, but there is nothing to indicate that Elimelech, Naomi, or their sons had committed sins worthy of wiping out all male members of the family.

Had God arbitrarily brought such travail upon Naomi? Does God intentionally send bad things to plague good people? Such issues of theodicy gave rise to books such as Job and Ecclesiastes, and they arrived at no conclusive answer, other than that such things are beyond human understanding.

Do we want to think of God as one who purposefully sends disease to the innocent or who kills children to teach their parents a lesson? Are we to assume that human discipline and hard work count for nothing, but success or failure is due only to divine fiat? Most people would reject such a notion, though some remain who hold to the theologically unsupportable notion that "everything happens for a reason."

Whether God had intentionally turned against her or not, was Naomi wrong to voice such

The Hardest Question *continued*

complaints? We should not be too hard on her. The Bible affirms what some have called a “theology of complaint,” a God-granted freedom to express our pain and sorrow, even to question whether God has caused it. Job rightly raised such questions, as did Jeremiah in the Lamentations.

Having Naomi express her feelings with such brash freedom allows the narrator to depict “in somber and expressive hues the desolation, despair, and emptiness of the life of a woman ‘left alone without her two boys and without her husband’ (v. 5) in a world where life depends upon men” (Frederic Bush, *Ruth-Esther*, Word Biblical Commentary, Vol. 9 [Thomas Nelson, 1996], 95-96).

Where Naomi went wrong was to become so obsessed with her losses that she overlooked what she had gained: she was not alone or without support, for Ruth was with her, a daughter-in-law who Bethlehem’s women would acclaim more worthy than seven sons (Ruth 4:15). Naomi’s accusations against God may be theologically questionable, but they are understandable. Her failure to appreciate the love and presence of Ruth is a sign of a despair so deep that it had left her blind to the blessing God has given.

Naomi deserves our understanding. She lived in a male-dominated culture in which a woman’s worth was measured by her marriage and her sons. As a childless widow, she was looking at the prospect of little status and a future that would be dependent on the charity of others. Perhaps we can forgive Naomi for not yet appreciating what a redemptive gift her Moabite daughter-in-law would prove to be.

Decisions, Decisions

There are 10 different situations being passed around. List the characters involved and estimate the decision-making power each character has for your particular situation. Then, we will share our answers.

A family is planning a vacation.

A couple is choosing a retirement community.

A woman is choosing a new hair style.

A senior high school student is choosing a college.

A child is choosing a book to have read to her.

A person is choosing how fast to drive through town.

A person is deciding how to take vengeance.

A person is deciding between medical procedures.

A person is choosing which car to purchase.

A young person is deciding which friends to have over for an overnight party.

God moves in a mysterious way

Words: William Cowper Music: Thomas Ravenscroft

God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform;
He plants His footsteps in the sea
And rides upon the storm.

Deep in unfathomable mines
Of never failing skill
He treasures up His bright designs
And works His sovereign will.

Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take;
The clouds ye so much dread
Are big with mercy and shall break
In blessings on your head.

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust Him for His grace;
Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face.

His purposes will ripen fast,
Unfolding every hour;
The bud may have a bitter taste,
But sweet will be the flower.

Blind unbelief is sure to err
And scan His work in vain;
God is His own interpreter,
And He will make it plain.

