



Ruth Part 1

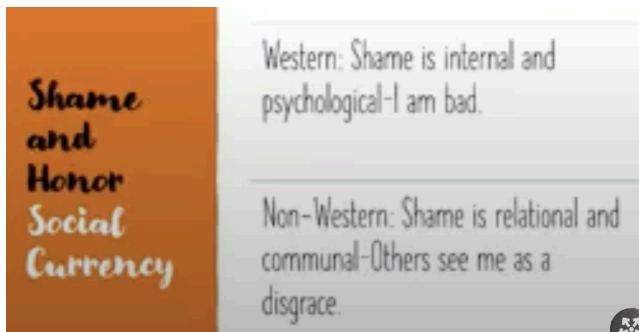
Chapter One

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We are in Ruth: I preached on this book 13 years ago when our church was mostly made up of single people, so I used this book to teach about dating: if you want to hear a bad sermon, go back and listen to this.

Ruth is located in the Old Testament between Joshua and Judges. It's only 88 verses!

But first, let's talk about shame and honor as a social currency: when you think about any narrative, you think in terms of **good/bad** and **innocent/guilty**. This is how we've been taught to read texts.



But if you are **not** a Westerner, stories are built instead on **shame/honor** culture. What the community thinks about me is most important: the more honor I have, the more I can speak and feel comfortable about who I am. Shame makes us have less social currency and, in fact, my very life may be in danger. As you read the OT and New Testaments, it's helpful to see things through the lens of honor/shame.

For example:

Mark 1:40-45

40 A man with leprosy came to him and begged him on his knees, "If you are willing, you can make me clean." 41 Jesus was **indignant**. He reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" 42 Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cleansed. 43 Jesus sent him away at once with a strong warning: 44 "See that you don't tell this to anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them." 45 Instead he went out and began to talk freely, spreading the news. As a result, Jesus could no longer enter a town openly but stayed outside in **lonely places**. Yet the people still came to him from everywhere.

In our time, if you get a cold, none of us would say it was because of some sin we committed recently. But in this culture, illness would be easily be connected with something either you or your relatives did.

When Jesus cleanses the man, he takes on the man's shame. If you

read this as a Westerner, we don't like it when the lepor doesn't do what he is told. But in the shame/honor culture, people see that Jesus has taken on the lepor's shame. It's not based on guilt or innocence, which is a Western point of view.

However, Western culture also incorporates shame in the form of embarrassment.



The book of Ruth is like a drama and every word means something. As we think about Ruth, imagine it is as a movie.

Giving spoilers is not a good idea, however. The movie *The Sixth Sense*: I unexpectedly heard a spoiler about this movie's ending right before I took my wife on a date. I knew the ending and she didn't....so I told her the ending before it was over. This was NOT a good move! This is also what I'm going to do with Ruth!



Ruth

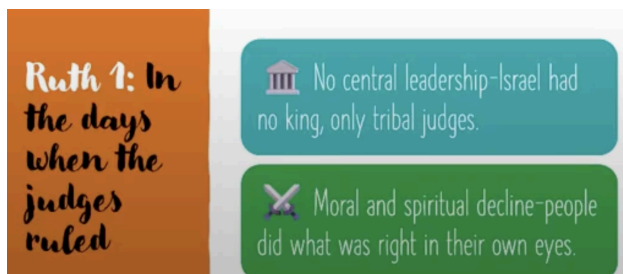
5 Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab, Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth, Obed the father of Jesse, 6 and Jesse the father of King David. (Matthew 1:5, 6)

Ruth is in the genealogy of Jesus, and this is very important!

Ruth 1:

1 In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land.

In the first verse of the book, we already see that there is a famine. Famine is important: it means judgment has come to Israel.

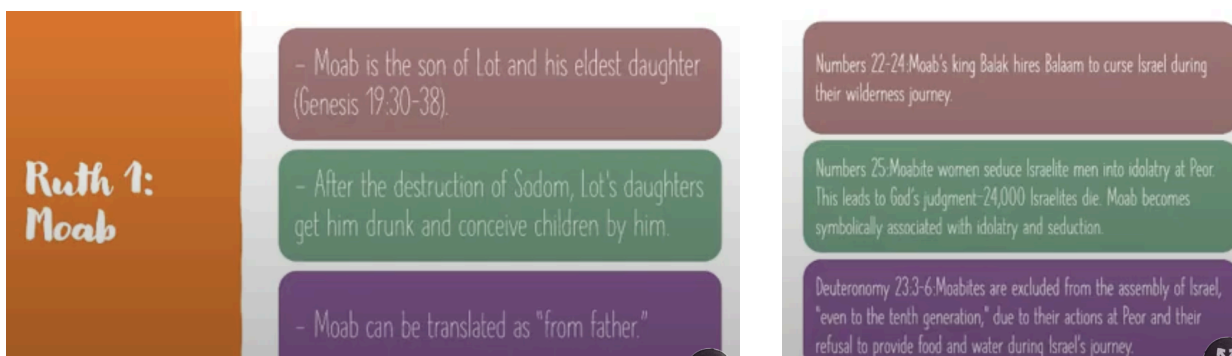


"In the days when the judges ruled" referred to the time after Joshua had died and there were no kings in Israel. There was moral and spiritual decline (Note: **don't read Judges** as bedtime stories to your children!) This is the time when Ruth takes place.

Ruth 1:

So a man from Bethlehem in Judah, together with his wife and two sons, went to live for a while in the country of **Moab**.

You are bad if you are a Moabite: Ruth takes places before the Moabite oppression. There is a famine in *Bethlehem*, the "house of bread." People left this place because Moab was the son of Lot and Lot's



Numbers 22-24: Moab's king Balak hires Balaam to curse Israel during their wilderness journey.

Numbers 25: Moabite women seduce Israelite men into idolatry at Peor. This leads to God's judgment: 24,000 Israelites die. Moab becomes symbolically associated with idolatry and seduction.

Deuteronomy 23:3-6: Moabites are excluded from the assembly of Israel, "even to the tenth generation," due to their actions at Peor and their refusal to provide food and water during Israel's journey.

daughter, who got her father drunk to carry on the family line. In fact, the women from Moab are considered destructive idolaters. Israelites did not worship with Moabites. This is important in order to understand Ruth.

Shame and honor: the thing that gives a woman honor is babies: to move the family line forward. The more offspring you have, the more people praise you and notice you. If you are in a foreign land with no husband or children, it's a very bad position to be in: Ruth had a lot of shame.

You're a Widow . . . You failed!

Isaiah 4:1 In that day seven women
will take hold of one man
and say, "We will eat our own food
and provide our own clothes;
only let us be called by your name.
Take away our disgrace!"

Being a widow means you failed: This is disgraceful: this is where we find Naomi.

Ruth 1

2 The man's name was Elimelek, his wife's name was Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Kilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem, Judah. And they went to **Moab** and lived there.

We learned in Ruth 1:1 that God provides! God provides through food; it is now a famine. Earlier in the Bible, God promised the land was a land of milk and honey: we can take this clue of hope.

Ruth 1 – Meet the Family

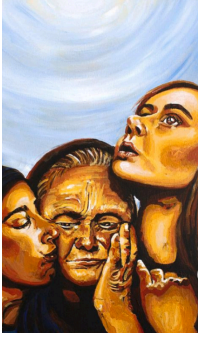
Elimelek – My God is King	Naomi - Sweet Orpah	Mahlon – Sickly/Weakness
Kilion – Wasting	Back of Neck or Turned	Ruth - Friend

Ruth 1

3 Now Elimelek, Naomi's husband, died, and she was left with her two sons. 4 They married Moabite women, one named Orpah and the other Ruth. After they had lived there about ten years, 5 both Mahlon and Kilion also died, and **Naomi was left without her two sons and her husband.**

Ruth 1

6 When Naomi heard in Moab that the **Lord had come to the aid of his people** by providing food for them, she and her daughters-in-law prepared to return home from there. 7 With her two daughters-in-law she left the place where she had been living and set out on the road that would take them back to the land of Judah.



Ruth 1

8 Then Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go back, each of you, to your mother's home. May the Lord show you kindness, as you have shown kindness to your dead husbands and to me. 9 May the Lord grant that each of you will find **rest in the home of another husband.**"

Then she kissed them goodbye and they wept aloud 10 and said to her, "We will go back with you to your people."

I think part of the reason is Emilech was a man of character: the DILs wanted to go with Naomi. But this is Western: Naomi is saying they don't have to take her shame but can find honor somewhere else. But they want to go with her.

Ruth 1

11 But Naomi said, "Return home, my daughters. Why would you come with me? Am I going to have any more sons, who could become your husbands? 12 Return home, my daughters; I am too old to have another husband. Even if I thought there was still hope for me—even if I had a husband tonight and then gave birth to sons— 13 would you wait until they grew up? Would you remain unmarried for them? **No, my daughters. It is more bitter for me than for you, because the Lord's hand has turned against me!**"

In a shame/honor culture you put shame onto the person who created the shame. Ruth puts the shame onto God: you cast out your shame on that which created the shame and declare this is who you are because of this. Ruth is saying they didn't need to be a part of this: they could home and escape the shame.

Ruth 1

14 At this they wept aloud again. Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law goodbye, but Ruth clung to her.

15 "Look," said Naomi, "your sister-in-law is going back to her people and her gods. Go back with her."

Because Ruth is the star of the story, we often think Orpah did the wrong thing. NO! She simply obeyed her MIL and chose honor instead of shame. She went home to her own gods. One chose honor and one chose shame.

Ruth 1:

16 But Ruth replied, "Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. **Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. 17 Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if even death separates you and me.**" 18

When Naomi realized that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped urging her.

Let's pause here: this is a powerful statement but it is what we say when we get married! "Your people will be my people, etc." Later when people outside of Judaism became Jews, they would say this. This is so powerful: Naomi says she gets it.

Ruth 1

19 So the two women went on until they came to Bethlehem. When they arrived in Bethlehem, **the whole town was stirred because of them, and the women exclaimed, “Can this be Naomi?”** 20 **“Don’t call me Naomi,”** she told them. **“Call me Mara, because the Almighty has made my life very bitter.** 21 I went away full, but the **Lord has brought me back empty.** Why call me Naomi? **The Lord has afflicted me; the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me.”**

Her friends haven’t seen Naomi in a long time and she wants to be called a new name now to underscore her misfortune. It is remarkable that Ruth wants to go with her. But Naomi says this is God’s fault: she casts her shame on Him.

Bitter means resentful: she went away with honor and came back with shame. It’s remarkable that Ruth is going with a bitter, old

lady: that is what we think but Ruth is saying it’s God’s fault she is that way. That is how Chapter 1 ends:



Ruth 1

22 So Naomi returned from Moab accompanied by **Ruth the Moabite**, her daughter-in-law, arriving in Bethlehem as the **barley harvest was beginning.**

You will see “Ruth the Moabite” several times. But she returns with a DIL who is a seductress. But the last line has hope: the Barley harvest is beginning. Things are changing as life and provision comes from the barley harvest.

Feast of Weeks: Shavuot

(Leviticus 23; Deuteronomy 16)

Conversion and Inclusion

Ruth, a Moabite, joins the people of Israel. This echoes the giving of the Torah at Sinai—when Israel became a covenant people—and reminds hearers that the Torah is for all who choose to follow the Lord.

Davidic Lineage

Traditionally, King David was born and died on Shavuot. Since Ruth is his great-grandmother, her story connects directly to the messianic hope tied to David’s line.

Today is actually the Feast of Wheats: Shabbat, the celebration of the harvest, 50 days after passover. Ruth is always read at this feast to remind people that the Torah is for all people and Ruth is King David’s great grandmother and he was born and died on this day.

We don’t know who wrote Ruth...most think it was David. Some say it’s to make sense of a Moabite

woman in the line of David.

Wrestle over this: Naomi is a place of shame, the bottom of the bottom. Ruth has a choice to leave but instead clings to her and takes on her identity of shame. I want you to think about this: we also have social shame in this culture and we call it embarrassment or anxiety (over things done to us). We feel pushed out of the main space of relationships. We have this in our own lives but we also know people here and elsewhere who also have social shame, people who feel they are outcasts.

Consider the message in Heb 13: 11-16:

Ruth — Jesus

11 The high priest carries the blood of animals into the Most Holy Place as a sin offering, but the bodies are burned outside the camp.

12 And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood. 13 Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore. 14 For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come. 15 Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that openly profess his name. 16 And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased. (Hebrews 13:11-16)

Two things happen when we follow Jesus:

- 1 He takes on your shame and
2. You don't stay in the city but go out and identify with him.

But Ruth invites us into something bigger, a way to understand how to be like Jesus. We are invited **to take on the shame of one another and begin to offer honor back** by including people and doing good for others (this is the sacrifice)

Who is God inviting you to take on their shame in a dramatic way?

Where is the Naomi in your life?

What shame do you need to let go of and give to Jesus? Don't think about this in a Western-world, psychological way: think of it as this: when you walk into groups of people, what are you ashamed of? What do you think people think about you? Take things and put them at the feet of Jesus and help others to do the same.

Instead of going home to her own people and finding her own husband, Ruth agrees to follow someone at the bottom of the rung. She challenges us to radically change the way we operate with one another: to be conscious of others' shame and brokenness.

Hopefully you are excited about Ruth and it will be transformative.

Personal story from Eric of how to take on someone's shame practically: one of my best friends from high school was a typical nerd. I was in a business class and people were throwing paper at his head: I sat with him and befriended him. Others asked me why I would do this and I lost friends because of this and went a different path. It was a huge cost to me. But later this man met Jesus in the military and his chaplain contacted me as the one person he wanted to know what had happened to him. Later, he even contributed to the Village.