



The Philip Series

Ruth: Friendship and Sacrifice

Rev. Bijan Mirtolooi

INTRODUCTION TO THE PHILIP SERIES

Acts 8:26 Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Rise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." This is a desert place. 27 And he rose and went. And there was an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure. He had come to Jerusalem to worship 28 and was returning, seated in his chariot, and he was reading the prophet Isaiah. 29 And the Spirit said to Philip, "Go over and join this chariot." 30 So Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" 31 And he said, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. 32 Now the passage of the Scripture that he was reading was this:

"Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter
and like a lamb before its shearer is silent,
so he opens not his mouth.

33 In his humiliation justice was denied him.
Who can describe his generation?
For his life is taken away from the earth."

34 And the eunuch said to Philip, "About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?" 35 Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus.

Why these five books?

Ruth – Feast of Weeks
Esther – Purim
Ecclesiastes – Feast of Tabernacles
Lamentations – Ninth of Ab
Song of Solomon – Passover

1. What is their main message?
2. How do they impact life in community?
3. How do they point forward to Christ?



I. INTRODUCTION TO RUTH

A. Authorship

B. Canonicity

The book of Ruth stirred up no disagreement in antiquity over its canonicity. In the first century A.D., both Jewish and Christian writers drew upon it without hesitation as a record of sacred history.¹

Placement in the Canon?

- In the English Bible, it appears after Judges
- In the Hebrew Bible, it appears after Proverbs

C. Overview of the story

Famine in Bethlehem

Journey to Moab

Calamity strikes

The Lord's direct intervention (1:6 and 4:13)

D. The main themes of Ruth

The hidden hand of God

The life of *hesed*

¹ Robert Hubbard, *The Book of Ruth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 4-5.



II. THE HIDDEN HAND OF GOD²

It is correct to observe that God's activity in the Ruth book is very much that of the one in the shadows, the one whose manifestation is not by intervention but by a lightly exercised providential control. It is equally correct to say as well that God is the primary actor in the drama.³

A. Naomi's complaint

Shaddai has dealt very bitterly with me (1:20b)

The LORD has brought me back empty (1:21a)

The LORD has testified against me (1:21b)

Shaddai has brought calamity upon me (1:21c)

B. Naomi and C.S. Lewis

Not that I am...in much danger of ceasing to believe in God. The real danger is of coming to believe such dreadful things about Him. The conclusion I dread is not, "so there's no God after all," but, "so this is what God's really like. Deceive yourself no longer."⁴

C. Return home (1:22)

Hemmah is injecting a note of sly and good-humored wonder: "Well, what do you know, they arrived in Bethlehem for barley harvest – just the right time!"⁵

D. The provision of gleaning

When you reap your harvest in your field and forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it. It shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow, that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands. (Deuteronomy 24:19)

² The theological term for this is "Providence."

³ Edward F. Campbell Jr., *Ruth* (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1975), 28-29.

⁴ C.S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed* (New York: Harper Collins, 1994), 5, 6.

⁵ Campbell, *Ruth*, 78.



E. “And she happened” (2:3)

The kinsman-Redeemer (Leviticus 25:25-30; 48-49)

In this context the narrator draws attention to Ruth’s chance arrival at a field of Boaz even more pointedly with the redundant phrase “her chance chanced upon,” which in modern idiom would be rendered “by a stroke of luck.”

By excessively attributing Ruth’s good fortune to chance, he forces the reader to sit up and take notice, to ask questions concerning the significance of everything that is transpiring. The statement is ironical; its purpose is to undermine purely rational explanations for human experiences and to refine the reader’s understanding of providence. In reality he is screaming, “See the hand of God at work here!”⁶

F. The hand of God through his people: the life of *hesed*

The book [of Ruth] presupposes that God acts in the acts of its human characters... The book’s teaching is simple and straightforward: whenever people of faith practice God-like *hesed* toward each other, God himself acts in them.⁷

⁶ Daniel Block, Judges, *Ruth* (Nashville: B&H, 1999), 653.

⁷ Hubbard, *The Book of Ruth*, 71-72.



III. THE LIFE OF HESED

A. Ordinary and extraordinary

The period of the Judges

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. (Judges 2:11-12)

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

B. What is *hesed*?

Difficult to define

Hesed and covenant

The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, "The Lord, The Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love (*hesed*) and faithfulness. (Exodus 34:6)

Know therefore that the Lord your God is God the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love (*hesed*) with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations. (Deuteronomy 7:9)

In itself, however, *hesed* is not grace but faithful love. It is the covenantal loyalty shown by the Lord even to sinners when they again fulfilled the ordinances of the covenant. In his *hesed* he received them again into his covenant.⁸

⁸ Nelson Glueck, *Hesed in the Bible* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1967).



C. *Hesed* in the book of Ruth (1:8; 2:20; 3:10)

The characteristic term for describing the loyal, caring relationships between the characters in the story, as we have seen, has been *hesed*.⁹

Indeed, ranking just below the narrator's concern to essay God's providential care and direction of history is his goal of describing what *hesed* looks like in the context of personal, family, and communal life.¹⁰

The *hesed* of Naomi to Ruth and Orpah

The *hesed* of Ruth to Naomi

The *hesed* of Ruth to Boaz

The *hesed* of Boaz to Ruth (and Naomi)

D. Summary¹¹

Hesed requires extraordinary commitment

Hesed is willing to take extraordinary risks

Hesed must see things done in the proper way

⁹ B.G. Webb, *Five Festal Garments* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2000), 50.

¹⁰ Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 611,12.

¹¹ This list is adapted from Hubbard, *The Book of Ruth*, 4-5.



IV. APPLICATION

A. How do we become a people who show *hesed*?

Matthew 1:5

Joshua 2:14

God gives his steadfast love to his people not as end in itself, but so that they would go and live lives of *hesed* towards one another.

The *hesed* of Jesus Christ

He was led by his love for others into the world, to forget himself in the needs of others, to sacrifice self once for all upon the altar of sympathy. Self-sacrifice brought Christ into the world. And self-sacrifice will lead us, his followers, not away from, but into the midst of men. Wherever men suffer, there will we be to comfort. Wherever men strive, there will we be to help. Wherever men fail, there will we be to uplift. Wherever men succeed, there will we be to rejoice. Self-sacrifice means not indifference to our times and our fellows: it means absorption in them. It means forgetfulness of self in others... It means not that we should live one life, but a thousand lives – binding ourselves to a thousand souls by the filaments of so loving a sympathy that their lives become ours.¹²

B. He's got the whole world in his hands

Genealogy (4:18-22)

When I lay these questions before God I get no answer. But rather a special sort of no answer. It is not the locked door. It is more like a silent, certainly not uncompassionate gaze. As though He shook his head not in refusal but waiving the question. Like, "peace, child, you do not understand"... there is always a card in His hand that we did not know about.¹³

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust Him for His grace;
Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face.¹⁴

C. Why is Ruth read every year during the Feast of Weeks?

Love is the fulfilling of the law (Romans 13:10)

¹² B.B. Warfield, *The Person and Work of Christ* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1950), 574.

¹³ Lewis, *A Grief Observed*, 67, 69.

¹⁴ William Cowper, "God Moves in a Mysterious Way," 1774.



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Part 1
Ruth. Friendship and Sacrifice

V. FOR FURTHER READING

Daniel Block, *Judges, Ruth* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999)

Edward F. Campbell, *Ruth* (Garden City: Double Day, 1975)

Jonathan Edwards, "Ruth's Resolution," in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1990)

John Flavel, *The Mystery of Providence* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1995)

Nelson Gluek, *Hesed in the Bible* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1967)

~~Robert L. Hubbard, Jr., *The Book of Ruth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988)~~

Paul Miller, *A Loving Life* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2014)

Barry Webb, *Five Festal Garments* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2000)