

## STUDIES IN RUTH

### STUDY 1/CHAPTER 1 : "LIVING ABROAD - EMPTINESS"

#### INTRODUCE SERIES

The Bible - source of our faith. Important to know and understand what is in it.

Faith not based on personal opinion or second-hand advice, but on what the Bible says (Billy Graham).

Jeremiah 9:23-24 God says "Don't boast about being clever, strong or rich. The only thing worth boasting about is understanding and knowing me, being familiar with my character - that's what really makes me happy".

This 4-week series takes one of the most well-loved books and explores what it tells us about how to live as Christians today.

Lots to learn from this book - about church, about Jesus, about marriage ...

This study looks at the topic of revival - much talked about these days. What can we learn from an OT love story about the meaning of revival today?

#### INTRODUCE RUTH

Fable, parable or fact?

Starts "Now it came to pass ..." = historical narrative (same as Joshua & Judges)

Ends with link to King David, born in 1040 or 1060 BC

- this was written about 60-80 years before, i.e. 1120 BC, i.e. Bronze Age

#### CHAPTER 1 - THE STORY

Meet the family :

- Elimelech (God is king)
- Naomi (my pleasant one)
- 2 sons Mahlon and Chilion

Lived in Bethlehem (house of bread), but there was a famine (irony)

Response - leave land of God's promise, go 50 mile trip abroad to Moab = enemies :

Moab = grandson of Lot = compromise

What should they have done?

"remained there" - settled, made home, married local girls (Orpah and Ruth)

After 10 years all the men died - tragedy for the women, no provider, no protector, no inheritance.

Naomi heard that God was again evident in Bethlehem, so decided to return. Orpah and Ruth initially went with her, but Naomi told them to stay at home.

Custom was for widows to become slaves to in-laws. Naomi released them from this commitment.

Orpah was easily persuaded and went back, but Ruth determined to go with Naomi - expressing total commitment to her mother-in-law (verses 16-17).

On returning to Bethlehem, the other women recognised Naomi, but she reacted in bitterness : "Call me Mara (bitter) not Naomi (my pleasant one) - because God has dealt bitterly with me."

She used El Shaddai - the formal name of God, emphasising his separation, greatness, impersonal, lack of relationship ...

## CHAPTER 2 - SO WHAT?

Many aspects apply to us - try some DIY expository preaching!

This chapter helps us to understand how to deal with difficulty and tragedy, with disappointment and hurt. And also what to do when we hear of God doing good things elsewhere.

There are three women - three responses.

Each had lost a husband, each was destitute and homeless, with no future.

How did they react to their circumstances?

Must have thought that God had deserted them (Elimelech died - God is King - death of faith, worship and hope)

How many of us feel that?

Heard that God was moving elsewhere, and all decided to go where God was.

A positive response, leaving tragedy behind, trying to get back to God.

Free to choose how to respond - not forced to go - John 15:14-15, Jesus releases us from slavery to friendship - what will we choose

There were three different choices :

1. Orpah - like Bianca in East Enders? Cried about loving Naomi, but in the end she left.

She returned to her people and her gods (Chemosh) - backsliding.

Like parable of soils (Matthew 13) - path or rocky soil or thorns.

Or John 6:66-69 - when the going gets tough, the tough push off? Jesus asks the same question to us - "Do you also want to go away?"

2. Naomi went back to Bethlehem, place of God's promise

BUT she was bitter, hurting and refusing to be comforted, holding a grudge against God, blaming him for what had happened. She was in the right place, but with the wrong attitude.

Hebrews 12:15 - beware of the root of bitterness - hurts lots of people

Ephesians 4:30-32 - put away bitterness - hurts the Holy Spirit

Take advice from Murphy's award-winning TV ad campaign - "Like the Murphy's, I'm not bitter"

3. Ruth also went to Bethlehem. BUT for her it was a journey of faith, hope, optimism, trusting God for a new beginning. A new country, a new home, a new start ...

Isaiah 43:18-19 "Don't focus on the past - look, I'm doing something new, it's appearing before your very eyes, can't you see it?"

2 Corinthians 5:17 "If anyone is in Christ he is a new creation. The old has disappeared - look, the new has arrived!"

How about you and me?

Are we living in Moab instead of Bethlehem?

Have we been hurt or disappointed by life's circumstances?

How will we react?

- Like Orpah - give up our faith and go back?
- Like Naomi - blame God and become bitter?
- Like Ruth - trust God for a new start, going to Bethlehem?

NEXT WEEK - they arrived at beginning of barley harvest - what would happen?