

289.1: Women of Valor (OT Gospel Doctrine Lesson 20, Updated)

"All the City ... Doth Know That Thou Art a Virtuous Woman"

Our reading provides backgrounds for two heroes: Samuel and David. Specifically, it is a story of mothers/grandmothers of heroes. We all know who David is (one of the most complex characters in the bible), and Samuel is the prophet who transitions Israel from judges to king.

Ruth is a brief, delightful, and touching book with profound lessons. As the last sentence of the Oxford Annotated NRSV for the introduction to Ruth summarizes: "The Stance of Ruth is clear and unambiguous: kindness and loyalty are more important than ethnicity."

The first thing we need to do to frame this lesson properly is look more closely at the title of the lesson, taken from Ruth 3:11. The KJV is a translation into English from literally the 1500s, and we lose the meaning of many important words. The word "virtuous" translates the Hebrew "chayil" which means "valiant, capable, strong". The Septuagint Greek uses the word "dunamis" from which we get the word "dynamite" which is the same word in Mark 5:30 where the KJV says Jesus felt "virtue" leave him (power).

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- I. Reading Review
- II. Lesson
 - a. What powerful, capable women have influenced us?
 - b. Families of choice
 - c. Working within our culture
 - d. Conclusion: Follow excellence and character rather than standard roles and expectations.

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Reading Review

[Ruth 1](#) Ruth is set in the time of the Judges, which is why the book is placed between Judges and Samuel in the Christian Bible (In the Jewish Bible it is placed toward the end, in the "Writings" section). This book is a powerful tale of solidarity and resourcefulness by women, who were marginalized (considered property) in Israelite society. Women were usually attached to the men in their life. Instead, Ruth binds herself to her mother-in-law. Thus the most memorable lines of this book: ¹⁶But 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. ¹⁷Where 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." Note the heroine of the book is an outsider, a Moabite, who were considered enemies of Israel. Yet this fierce outsider is presented as an ancestor of both David and Jesus. (Also note the significant location of Bethlehem)

2 Ruth proactively and strategically works within the options her culture allows. The edges of the field were left unharvested so the poor could feed themselves, based on the commandment in Deut. 24:19/Lev. 23:22 "When you are harvesting in your field and you overlook a sheaf, do not go back to get it. Leave it for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow, so that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands." Boaz goes above and beyond the legal requirements and cares for Ruth. Boaz is called a "man of valor" ("mighty man of wealth" in the KJV), the same word *chayil* is used for both Boaz and Ruth. Boaz comments on Ruth's character and faithfulness to her family (which for him trumps her status as outsider). In verse 20 Naomi points out Boaz is one of her "redeeming kinsmen", the male in the family who is expected to carry out vengeance or care if a family member dies.

3 Naomi pretty much suggests that Ruth seduce Boaz. Nothing inappropriate happens, but Boaz gets the message and says that if the "nearer kinsman" won't marry her, he will.

4The happy ending, Israelite style. Note that Ruth is "purchased as wife" along with all the other property. Boaz and Ruth and Naomi all act nobly, but also within their culture. One fascinating thing about this book is that it both follows and subverts cultural norms: In this chapter the people tell Naomi that Ruth, her foreign daughter in law, is "better than seven sons". And the story ends by mentioning David, considered the greatest hero in Israel.

1 Samuel 1 Hannah is Elkanah's favored wife, even though she isn't able to have children (which was perhaps the primary marker of a woman's worth in the culture of the time). With a blessing from the priest she miraculously conceives and Samuel is born. Samuel is dedicated to the Lord and given to the priests to raise.

2:1-2, 20-21 We again see the pattern that the standard figures fail (Eli's sons, who are disappointing priests and humans) and the figure raised up by God (Samuel) takes their place.

Lesson

- e. What powerful, capable women have influenced us?
- f. Families of choice (share the quote as well as the parallel in John, how John teaches that we enter into a familial relationship with God) Ruth 1:16-17. Note the parallel in Jesus' words to Mary Magdalene in one of my all time favorite verses, 20:17: ¹⁷Jesus said to her, "Do not [continue to] cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" John teaches us how we enter into a familial relationship with God: In those verses the disciple gains a new father, at the cross the disciple gains a mother "behold your mother/behold your child", with the Spirit the disciple gains parents "I will not leave you orphans" (14:18), and careful reading of John 20 presents Jesus and Mary as spouses. Our

relationship with God increases intimacy and union across all the rest of our relationships.

- g. Working within our culture (Do as much good as we can in our contexts as they are. Think outside the box, work within the box, change the box as you can; solutions need to be system wide and system deep)
 - h. Conclusion: Follow excellence and character rather than standard roles and expectations. (which also lines up nicely with what Jesus taught

289.2: Women of Valor (OT Gospel Doctrine Lesson 20, Sunday School)

[“All the City ... Doth Know That Thou Art a Virtuous Woman”](#)

The little book of Ruth, one of the masterpieces of Biblical literature, teaches profound and challenging principles. Themes include not overlooking those we consider outsiders and the power of steadfast love to restore that which is lost. This portion of the episode covers:

- Themes of Ruth
- What we learn from each character
 - Hannah
 - Naomi
 - Ruth
- Caring for outsiders and marginalized
- Families of choice and covenant

289.3: Women of Valor (OT Gospel Doctrine Lesson 20, Study Notes)

[“All the City ... Doth Know That Thou Art a Virtuous Woman”](#)

This portion of the episode covers:

II. Scholarship

1. Discussion of the Israelite Redeemer (Go'el), Levirate Marriage, and Nazirites
2. Historical Context of Ruth

III. Study Notes

1. Ruth's questionable behavior on the threshing floor
2. Working within suboptimal social situations
3. Parallels to Hannah's consecration of Samuel