

RUTH; 1 SAMUEL 1–3

Introduction

The following “Witnessing Christ from the Old Testament” study covers Ruth and 1 Samuel 1–3.

[You can find the LDS outline of study and resources here.](#)

LDS Study Focus

LDS study material will focus on:

Sometimes we imagine that our lives should follow a clear path from beginning to end. The shortest distance between two points is a straight line, after all. And yet life is often full of delays and detours that take us in unexpected directions. We may find that our lives are quite different from what we thought they should be.

Ruth and Hannah surely understood this. Ruth was not an Israelite, but she married one, and when her husband died, she had a choice to make. Would she return to her family and her old, familiar life, or would she embrace the Israelite faith and a new home with her mother-in-law? (see [Ruth 1:4–18](#)). Hannah’s plan for her life was to bear children, and her inability to do so left her “in bitterness of soul” (see [1 Samuel 1:1–10](#)). As you read about Ruth and Hannah, consider the faith they must have had to put their lives in the Lord’s hands and travel their unexpected paths. Then you might think about your own journey. It will look different from Ruth’s and Hannah’s—and anyone else’s. But throughout the trials and surprises between here and your eternal destination, you can learn to say with Hannah, “My heart rejoiceth in the Lord” ([1 Samuel 2:1](#)).

Biblical Focus

During the dark days of the Judges, defined by cycles of faithlessness, idolatry, and oppression, the faiths of Ruth, Boaz, Hannah, and Samuel shine bright. Their stories also point forward to the coming Redeemer.

As you study these short narratives, follow the identity changes of Ruth and Samuel.

Ruth began as a pagan, a Moabite, a widow, a beggar, and a foreigner. But as the book closes, she is a believer, part of Israel, a wife, and an heiress in the messianic line of Judah.

Samuel began as a miracle boy, sent to serve in the tabernacle, and would eventually lead God’s people out of the time of the judges and into the time of the kings.

RUTH

The book of Ruth takes place during the time of the Judges. This period was a dark time in Israel's history as they cycled through rebellion, oppression, repentance, and rescue. In those days, "everyone did as he saw fit" ([Judges 21:25](#)). Even the judges themselves struggled with idolatry and self-interest.

During this dark time, the book of Ruth is a beacon of hope, highlighting God's hand as he cares for the individual, Israel, and the world.

Elimelech faced a difficult choice for himself and his family. Should they leave the promised land and live among pagans or stay and face the uncertain hardships of the famine? God commanded the Israelites to live on the land he had given them and avoid intermingling with unbelievers. Yet, even Abraham and Jacob had left the land for respite during famines ([Genesis 12:10](#), [Genesis 46:3–7](#)). Although we do not know if God approved or disapproved of Elimelech's choice, we can use this as a chance to talk about making hard decisions.

Moab ([Ruth 1:1](#))

In Moab, about 100 miles from Bethlehem, lived the Moabites, descendants of Abraham's nephew Lot. They were pagans who worshiped Chemosh. We remember them from the story of Balaam as they tried to curse Israel. Later, Moabite women seduced the Israelite men, tempting them to forsake the Lord and worship idols ([Numbers 25:1–4](#)). They were hostile to God and not chosen by him ([Deuteronomy 23:3–4](#)). Surprisingly, such a fantastic story takes place in this country.

Naomi's Identity ([Ruth 1:11–14](#), [1:20–21](#))

Naomi had lost everything. In her cultural context, women were ascribed value, worth, and identity through their children and grandchildren. A woman's job was to produce heirs to strengthen her family's significance and line. The death of her sons made her a failure. She no longer had status and purpose according to her culture. So, Naomi, which means "pleasant," changed her name to Mara, which means "bitter."

Naomi's Faith ([Ruth 1:13,20](#))

We see from her words that Naomi's faith is challenged. Some of us know and understand the depth of grief she is experiencing and the effects such loss can have upon our relationship with God. Like Job, Naomi blamed God, yet she still looked to him in faith ([Ruth 1:6](#)). While Satan may use the anger of a Christian to turn a believer against God, God may use brokenness to drive a believer deeper into their need for him.

Ruth's Identity ([Ruth 1:16–17](#))

Against all earthly logic, Ruth, the Moabitess, proclaims an unexpected identity. Ruth knew the Lord. She believed it was better to leave behind her security and chance at a prosperous life in Moab than to be separated from God and Naomi. Instead, Ruth embraced her identity as the daughter of a poor widow. She bravely set her face toward the uncertain hardships that awaited her as a foreigner in a foreign land. She followed Naomi, but ultimately, she was following God.

To make sense of the following chapters, we need to understand a few key concepts about Israelite law and culture. First, remember, Elimelech had left behind his land in Bethlehem, and there was no longer an heir to claim it. Therefore, Naomi would need to sell the land to preserve herself and her line.

- **The Land:** God commanded that the land must remain within the possession of each tribe. All land that originally belonged to Judah must stay in the tribe of Judah ([Numbers 36:7–8](#)).
- **The Kinsman-Redeemer:** If the land was sold because of hardship, God established laws for the redemption of the land. The nearest relative was obligated to redeem or buy back what had been sold.
- **Widows and Redeemers:** A law (Levirate) required a brother to marry his sister-in-law if her husband, his brother, had died. Their firstborn son would be the heir of the first husband. This law did not apply to Boaz since he was not the brother of Mahlon. He freely chose to embrace the spirit of the law to provide for Ruth and produce an heir.

Hidden God ([Ruth 2:1–23](#))

As Ruth went out to find food, she happened to end up in the field of Boaz, a close relative of Naomi. Naomi's reaction indicated she believed that God's hand was at work. ([Ruth 2:20](#)) The same woman who blamed God for her troubles also ascribed to him her blessings.

Unless the Bible clearly states it, we cannot say *for sure* whether something is from the Lord. But we can rely on his promises and trust that he will steer history and our individual lives accordingly. See [Jeremiah 29:11](#) or [Romans 8:28](#) for examples of God's promises.

The Engagement ([Ruth 3:10–11](#))

The courtship and engagement of Ruth and Boaz are unique. Many of the marriages that are described in the Bible are infected with lust, jealousy, and adultery. Pause and study the love story of these two believers.

Kinsman-Redeemer ([Ruth 4:1–11](#))

The transaction between the relative and Boaz at the city gate is confusing. Boaz explains that he will marry Ruth, and then he will have the ability to produce an heir for Elimelech's land. The land would rightfully belong to this child. Because of this, it did not make sense for the other relative to buy the land.

This marriage and transaction foreshadowed the work of Christ. Ruth and Naomi had been cut off from the inheritance and blessings of the land. There was no work they could do to fix the situation. We have been cut off from the heritage of heaven with no ability to redeem it ourselves. Christ is our kinsman-redeemer who has freely chosen to make us his bride and has regained our eternal inheritance.

Conversation Starters:

- What do you think? Should Elimelech have stayed in the promised land, or did he do the right thing by moving his family to Moab? Do you think Elimelech took his faith in God with him? How do you know?
- How does your culture ascribe value, worth, and identity to women? To men? To children? What happens when part of your identity is taken from you? (What if you lost your job, spouse, or children?)
- At what should Naomi's anger actually be directed? (Sin? The power of death?) How would you comfort Naomi?
- Think of all that Ruth said goodbye to as she left her homeland. What would be the hardest for you to leave? How can our need for comfort, stability, and safety be an idol?
- Why did Ruth choose Boaz? Why did Boaz choose Ruth? ([Ruth 3:10-11](#))
- Discuss the meaning of the word "redeem."
- Why is it so surprising that Ruth is included in the line of the Savior Jesus?

Sharing Personally:

When I read the book of Ruth, I am reminded of where to take my true refuge in life.

Ruth, a hungry and helpless widow, took refuge in the shelter of the Almighty's wings and there found abundant reward. The Almighty moved toward Naomi, and Ruth moved, too, to keep enjoying the protection of God's wings. In doing so, she committed herself to caring for Naomi with the care she was receiving from her protector. Taking refuge under God's wings and leaving home to care for Naomi while still under God's wings enabled Ruth to forsake human shelter and give herself in love to Naomi.

I won't find refuge in my contributions to God, in my culture, or ultimately even in the comfort of my family. Instead, I will find true refuge in God and God alone.

Our Heavenly Father is like an eagle looking for eaglets who will take refuge under his wings. He is looking for people who will leave father and mother and homeland or anything else that may hold us back from a life of love under the wings of Jesus' love.

Additional resources: For more insights and a deeper dive into the Ruth narrative, check out [Ruth's Story: Refuge Under His Wings](#) on beyeperfect.org.

A Time of Transition

The book of Judges was a book of chaos and moral decline that showed Israel's great need for wise and faithful leaders. It concludes, "Israel had no king, and everyone did as he saw fit ([Judges 21:25](#))." The book of Samuel now traces Israel's history as they become a united kingdom ruled by a king.

1 SAMUEL 1–3

Though coming after the Book of Judges, the opening chapters of 1 Samuel record events that occurred *during* the period of the judges. Samuel and his sons were the last of the judges of Israel ([1 Samuel 8:1](#)). The up and down seasons of leadership under the judges have made the people grow weary of the constant transitions of judges.

The tabernacle (the tent of God) was in Shiloh at that time. The faithful, such as Elkanah and his family, would visit the tabernacle on occasion, probably at the feasts of Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles—the three major festivals of the Old Testament liturgical calendar. Then, they would offer sacrifices, fulfill vows, pray, and receive the instruction of the priests. Eli and his sons had charge of the ins and outs of the tabernacle liturgy and worship life. Although he served faithfully, as we will see, Eli essentially turned a blind eye to his sons' contempt of God's Law (2:12–17) and their debauchery with the women who served at the tabernacle (2:22). At this time, God raised up a new leader, Samuel.

Like Isaac and Jacob, Samuel would be born from a womb that appeared as if it would never bear a child. Hannah's suffering was doubled because her husband's other wife, Peninnah, mocked her (1:6). It seemed the Lord had not only "closed her womb" (1:6) but "in anger shut up his compassion" as well (Psalm 77:9). But the Lord was neither deaf to Hannah's cries nor hard-hearted regarding her plight. The Lord waited to answer her prayers when the time was right. Her son Samuel would go on to guide the people of Israel during one of the most critical times of transition in Israel's history, as they moved from the period of the judges to the time of the kings.

Elkanah's Worship Practices ([1 Samuel 1:2–18](#))

1 Samuel 1 introduces us to a family faithful to the LORD. Elkanah is a descendant of Aaron from the tribe of Levi. His annual travels to the tabernacle were in obedience to the commands of God, but his family was not required to join him.

LDS members will no doubt connect this to how the males in their homes are to serve as the spiritual leaders and priests for their families.

Peninnah ([1 Samuel 1:4–8](#))

As seen in other Biblical narratives, fertility was highly valued in the Israelite culture. For Peninnah, children gave her status and bragging rights. They were what gave her permission to shame the rival wife, Hannah. It is easy to scoff at Peninnah, saying, "How could she be so cruel?" But don't we do the same anytime we look down on others because we are blessed differently than them? My insecure nature desperately needs to be better than others. As I write this, it is much easier for me to think about all the other people who struggle with this sin more than I do.

Polygamy

Although this might seem like an appropriate place to talk about polygamy and the negative impact that it can have on a marriage, this is such a sticky subject with Mormons that it would be best to avoid unless your LDS friend or family member first brings it up.

God never sanctioned a husband to have more than one wife. Polygamy caused family strife here with Hannah and in many other places in Scripture. Throughout the books of Samuel, we see the trouble it caused when men and women do not follow God's plan for sex and marriage.

The polygamous relationships in the Bible were never prescriptive; *“Go and do this,”* but rather descriptive, *“This is what they did and what happened because of it.”* There is not a single polygamous relationship in the Bible that is shown to be healthy and happy.

The LORD Closed her Womb ([1 Samuel 1:6](#))

Why did God do this to Hannah? “Why?” is the question we always want to ask God. But we can never know the answer for sure unless the Bible *clearly* gives it to us. However, we can patiently wait for God to reveal his purpose during suffering. Then, when suffering ends, we can reflect on the blessings given to us because of it.

I Will Give him to the LORD ([1 Samuel 1:11,28](#))

It is challenging to fathom dropping my young child off to be raised by another. I cling to my children too tightly. What Hannah realized was that Samuel never belonged to her in the first place. He belonged to the LORD.

It is the same for us. Our children don’t belong to us. They belong to the LORD. He has entrusted us with their care. (Please don’t be confused by this account. You still need to pick your children up after you drop them off for Sunday School or Youth Group.)

It has been years since Israel had a strong godly leader who would teach Israel to turn to the LORD. Eli was no exception. First, his children publicly spurned the Lord in the house of worship. Then under his watch, the ark of the covenant, being used as a good luck charm, was lost to the Philistines.

Hophni and Phineas ([1 Samuel 2:12–17,22](#))

As children of the High Priest, Hophni and Phineas were leaders who publicly served in the tabernacle, assisting with the sacrifices of the people. The sacrifices of the people were meant to help feed the priests. However, Hophni and Phineas would greedily claim the best parts for themselves. Thus, they made a mockery of the sacrificial ritual.

Later, we read that they were committing adultery with the women who served at the tabernacle. Such unbelief in a leadership position ruined worship for many.

In unbelief, Hophni and Phineas made a mockery of the sacrifices that were brought before the Lord. They were unrepentant and spurned forgiveness. They rejected the atonement made for their sins.

Although we see evidence that Eli has faith, this passage makes it clear that God is placing the blame on Eli for the sins of his children. We do not have many details about Eli’s failure, but we know he ate from the stolen sacrifices ([1 Samuel 2:29](#)), and he did not use his authority to stop their public sins.

Samuel’s Call ([1 Samuel 3:1–21](#))

Samuel was around 12 years old at the time of this account. The priesthood was corrupt, and there was no recognized prophet whom the people could consult. Chapter 3 begins with the eerie phrase, “In those days the word of the Lord was rare, there were not many visions.” God, however, called to Samuel and told him that he was going to remove Eli’s evil sons from the priestly line. Because “the Lord was with him,” everything that Samuel prophesied came true, and the people began to revere him as the prophet in Israel.

How Do We Hear His Voice?

Mormons reading this section will likely think about how they are taught to hear the Lord's voice. It might be worth discussing how we properly hear the Lord's voice today and how we know if something is really from the Lord. A discussion about how we listen to the voice of the Lord today might provide for some valuable discussion.

God encourages us to go straight to the source. The words recorded in the Bible come directly from the mouth of God ([2 Timothy 3:16](#)), so you can be sure he's talking. Unlike other sources, when you listen to these words, you can be sure they are true ([John 17:17](#)); this allows you to hear him with certainty!

Additional Resources: For more about hearing the voice of the Lord, check out the article [Can I Really Hear Him?](#) on beyeperfect.org.

Conversation Starters:

- **Why do you think Elkanah brought his family with him to the tabernacle? How did this impact Hannah's relationship with the LORD?**
- **It is so difficult to confess, but your transparency will help others be transparent and honest about their sins. How do you struggle with comparison sins? Why did Peninnah do it? Why do you do it?**
- **What blessings came because of Hannah's suffering? What blessings come from our suffering?**
- **How do we treat our children as possessions? How do we treat a possession that belongs to someone we honor, respect, or even fear?**
- **Although Eli did not actively participate in his sons' sins, how did he condone them? Was it fair for God to judge Eli for the sins of his children?**
- **Are you surprised that God allowed Eli to be entrusted with the upbringing of Samuel? How does this demonstrate God's grace toward Eli?**
- **How can we be people who "listen to our Lord"? What does this look like in everyday life?**

Sharing Personally:

In 1 Samuel 1–3, when I read about Samuel's miraculous birth, his Call into God's service, and God's burdensome commands, I marvel at how God has worked throughout history to preserve and provide for his people.

At a pivotal time in Israel's history, when everyone did as they pleased and there was no king, God used Samuel to guide and direct his people in his ways. Even though God would have had every right to turn his back on his people, he sought them out and cared for them.

At this time in history, when again everyone wants to do what pleases them, God still sends faithful leaders to guide and direct his people. Even though God would have every right to turn his back on those who have turned their backs on him, God still seeks out the lost with a desire to care for them and draw them to himself.

I pray that God would give me the kind of love he has and a heart to turn people towards him.