

## Best Laid Plans... A picture of God's provision. 3.17.19

The news always felt like it was either more of the same... bad news. Or, like things were developing so fast that it was overwhelming to keep up with it. She would find herself listening, scanning, cruising the reports... anything new? Any word from home? Then, one day it came... things were better; she could go home.

See, they never meant to be here long. It was an in-between place. But, here she was, her in-between place, well it took everything she ever wanted. First her husband. Then her boys. And now, even with a faint whisper of good news, it is going to take her daughters. Well, they're her daughters-in-law... but they might as well have been daughters. No, it won't take them in the same way it took the men in her life... but, they can't go where she needs to go.

Sorrowful, lonely, heart-broken... she makes a plan, gathers the few remaining earthly possessions, and they take off for the border. Her in-between place will shortly be in her rearview mirror. But, her future... it's not all that promising. At least she won't be in the place that took everything from her.

### 1. God is present with us, even when best-laid plans go to waste. (Chap. 1)

- a. They didn't plan to be there long.
  - i. There was evidently no intention of a permanent migration. The use of the verb *gûr*, 'to sojourn', shows that the man planned to return in due course (Berkeley renders, *to live for a while*). It is the regular word for a resident alien.<sup>1</sup>
- b. A famine had popped up in Judah → Judges 6
  - i. The period of the Judges was a turbulent time.
    1. 21:25 → **"There was no King in Israel... and everyone did what was right in their own eyes."**
    2. There are 7 cycles of Judges... People sin... Cry out.. God sends a judge to rescue them.
    3. "There was no King..." **Descriptive** of the spiritual condition of the people → God was supposed to be their king.
      - a. **Prescriptive** of their next political / spiritual leadership situation.
  - ii. Droughts were sporadic and common... it is not unlikely that a regional or local drought could have caused a famine. → Again, not exactly a time period marked by generosity and care for others.
  - iii. Or, some scholars link this to the time of Gideon... Judges 6:1:1-6
    1. Midian depletes Israel's agricultural resources.
- c. **Ruth's husband makes the call... We're moving for a while.**
  - i. There was evidently no intention of a permanent migration. **The use of the verb *gûr*, 'to sojourn', shows that the man planned to return in due**

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<sup>1</sup> Cundall, A. E., & Morris, L. (1968). *Judges and Ruth: an introduction and commentary* (Vol. 7, p. 237). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

course (Berkeley renders, *to live for a while*). It is the regular word for a resident alien.<sup>2</sup>

- ii. Elimelech and his family move “for a while” to Moab.
  - 1. We’re not brought into the decision-making process...
    - a. There was a famine... they moved.
    - b. Who they decided that... not sure.
    - c. Right in their own eyes? Or, led by God?
      - i. The first option is far more plausible.
- iii. Ephrathites from Bethlehem - The use of the older name in such a connection may point us to the old established families, the local aristocracy (the Midrash records an interpretation of the word as meaning ‘aristocrats’, ii. 5).<sup>3</sup>

**1. Note: When Naomi returns, “all the city is interested/ excited” (1:19)**

- d. God is with us, even when our best-laid plans fail. (v.8-9: May the Lord deal kindly with you... Just as you have done.)
  - i. Naomi prays that Yahweh may *deal kindly* with them as they have done with the dead and with Naomi herself. **We should not overlook the fact that she uses the name ‘Yahweh’, the personal name of the God of Israel.** It might have been expected that in speaking of Moabite women in Moabite territory she would use either the general word ‘God’ (*‘ēlōhîm*) or else ‘Chemosh’ the name of one of the principal gods of the Moabites (Num. 21:29; 1 Kgs 11:7).<sup>4</sup>
  - ii. **Naomi is convinced of the one true God... even in her suffering.**
  - iii. **The key word is *hesed***, often rendered ‘loving-kindness’. It is a word which on occasion means something very like loyalty, and on occasion something very like love.<sup>5</sup>
    - 1. **Naomi is asking for Yahweh to show the same lovingkindness and loyalty that they have shown to her and her sons.**
      - a. **To the original audience this would have spoken about “covenant” ... an odd ring to it? → Would God really make covenant with those people!?**
      - b. It also includes elements of: mercy, steadfastness, love, faithfulness, and loyalty.
      - c. This is the kind of commitment a mother / father makes to their child.
  - iv. **God’s faithfulness and presence are not dependent on our circumstances or prosperity.**

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<sup>2</sup> Cundall, A. E., & Morris, L. (1968). *Judges and Ruth: an introduction and commentary* (Vol. 7, p. 237). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

<sup>3</sup> Cundall, A. E., & Morris, L. (1968). *Judges and Ruth: an introduction and commentary* (Vol. 7, p. 240). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

<sup>4</sup> Cundall, A. E., & Morris, L. (1968). *Judges and Ruth: an introduction and commentary* (Vol. 7, p. 245). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

<sup>5</sup> Cundall, A. E., & Morris, L. (1968). *Judges and Ruth: an introduction and commentary* (Vol. 7, p. 245). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

1. God doesn't remove his presence or his faithfulness from Naomi.
  - a. **She is rightfully struggling! → Much like Job. (v.1:20)**
    - i. She knows what is ahead of her, and behind her.
  - b. But, she doesn't jump ship from the idea that God is loving-kindness. (hessed)
2. This is a big part of the storyline of this book... God knows that life on this side of heaven is tough.
  - a. We make bad choices.
  - b. Other make bad choices that affect us.
  - c. The natural world is a broken place.
    - i. **God doesn't remove his presence or faithfulness from us just because.**

## 2. Regular obedience is God's love language. (Chap. 2)

- a. **The book of Judges tells of war and strife, but Ruth is a quiet story of ordinary people going about their quiet lives.**
  - i. This is an important contrast to the time of the Judges, and an important context note.
    1. The world at the time of Ruth's life was chaotic. Knowing that makes what is about to happen all the wilder and more amazing!
    2. But, it also has an important lesson for you and me.
      - a. **Regular obedience is God's love language.**
- b. **Let's recap: Ruth & Naomi**
  - i. Naomi... She is convinced of God's faithful presence and sovereignty.
    1. Responds to the provision of God (v.1:6)
  - ii. Ruth... I will go with you... Your God will be my God. (v.1:16)
    1. Naomi's God will be her God. This does not mean that she has no religious principles or that she rates friendship above faith. In the very next verse she invokes Yahweh, which indicates that already she has come to trust in him (cf. 2:12). **Her trust may not have been well informed, but it was real.**<sup>6</sup>
  - iii. **They are convinced of who God is, and although what is set before them is hard... they don't give up trust in the Lord.**
- c. **We meet Boaz... A man of noble character ... or a worthy man.**
  - i. Boaz **may have been a warrior**, for these were troubled times and any man might have to fight. But in this book he appears rather as a solid citizen, **a man of influence and integrity in the community** and it is likely that this is what the term denotes here.<sup>7</sup>
  - ii. How do we see his character? Consider the practice of gleaning:
    1. The practice of gleaning is not dependent on the whims of the landowner, it is a law.

<sup>6</sup> Cundall, A. E., & Morris, L. (1968). *Judges and Ruth: an introduction and commentary* (Vol. 7, p. 251). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

<sup>7</sup> Cundall, A. E., & Morris, L. (1968). *Judges and Ruth: an introduction and commentary* (Vol. 7, p. 260). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

- a. **It was laid down in the law that at harvest-time a man must not reap his land to the very border, nor should he pick up what was left after the reapers went through (Lev. 19:9; 23:22). Indeed, if he forgot a sheaf and left it in the field he was forbidden to go back for it (Deut. 24:19).**
2. However, it is wise for Ruth (a foreigner) to glean in the fields of a generous and would regard her with favor.
- d. **Obedience demonstrates our covenantal commitment to the Lord.**
  - i. **“Obedience is the key to all doors; feelings come (or don’t) and go as God pleases.” - C.S. Lewis**
    1. Obedience demonstrates what is true of us farthest down deep in our cores.
  - ii. Jesus says it this way:
    1. **Jesus answered him, “If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.” – Jn. 14:23**
      - a. How do we know if we are joined in God’s eternal purposes? → We obey God’s principles.
  - iii. **What does regular obedience look like in my life?**
    1. Employee: Ethical hard work. A team player, who can say hard things in love (ie. a well polished way).
    2. Student: I do what’s right when no one is looking.
    3. Husband / Wife: I serve my spouse in a way that reminds them that God is good.
    4. Son / daughter: I respect my parents and honor their wishes when they line up with God’s wishes.

### 3. Regular obedience makes more than a small difference. (Chap. 3&4)

- a. Ruth didn’t just “happen” to be in Boaz’s field.
  - i. She came to the field and, apparently by chance, worked in a particular section of the field, the section which belonged to Boaz. Almost exactly the same expression is found in Ecclesiastes 2:14f. (‘one event happeneth’ to all men) and nowhere else in the Old Testament. **It points to the truth that men do not control events, but that the hand of God is behind them as he works his purpose out.**<sup>8</sup>
- b. v.20: Naomi rejoices and praises God for Boaz.
  - i. Initially, she is overwhelmed by Boaz’s kindness.
  - ii. **Then, she is praising God for his sustained love / faithfulness.**
    1. He has not ceased his loving-kindness **(the word is that used in 1:8; it denotes both kindness and faithfulness)** and she makes specific mention of the dead as well as the living (though *living* refers to Ruth and Naomi the form of the word is masculine; cf.

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<sup>8</sup> Cundall, A. E., & Morris, L. (1968). *Judges and Ruth: an introduction and commentary* (Vol. 7, pp. 261–262). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

1:8, where see note). There is a strong sense of family, so that any kindness that **God might show to Ruth and Naomi is a kindness to their dead relatives as well as to themselves.**<sup>9</sup>

- c. **We cannot underestimate the value of regular / boring obedience in God's economy.**

#### **4. God's presence is more significant than we will ever know. (4:17)**

- a. The author will reflect that God's hand is over all history. **God works out his purpose, generation after generation. Limited as we are to one lifetime, each of us sees so little of what happens.** A genealogy is a striking way of bringing before us the continuity of God's purpose through the ages. The process of history is not haphazard. There is a purpose in it all. And the purpose is the purpose of God.<sup>10</sup>
  - i. "God works out his purpose, generation after generation. Limited as we are to one lifetime, each of us sees so little of what happens." – Leon Morris
- b. **God works out his eternal purposes for, and through faithful people.**
- c. **Regular / ordinary obedience allows me to join into God's eternal purposes.**

**My boring / regular obedience in God's economy is the currency that communicates both my love for God, and leads me into the rich blessings of an eternal father.**

From: RUTH – Best-laid Plans: A picture of God's provision.

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3.17.19

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<sup>9</sup> Cundall, A. E., & Morris, L. (1968). *Judges and Ruth: an introduction and commentary* (Vol. 7, p. 271). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

<sup>10</sup> Cundall, A. E., & Morris, L. (1968). *Judges and Ruth: an introduction and commentary* (Vol. 7, p. 307). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.