

Lesson One

Making Sense of the Bible's Reliability

The goal of the next six written lesson will be to allow you to put into the practice the principles and insights we discuss. Some weeks, those principles will be more practical than others. I encourage you to use this time to try different methods of reading and studying the Bible than you have in the past.

Whether you are new or experienced in studying the Bible, I'm asking the Lord to use this time to ignite in us a curiosity, hunger, and passion to know His Word and to encounter the Him on these pages. As I've said before, reading and studying God's Word is about more than knowledge. It's about knowing God!

READ, READ, READ

1. Before you begin this lesson, take a moment and invite the Lord into this time. Why have you come to Bible study today? What do you hope to find? Tell Him those things.

Throughout these lessons we will use the book of Ruth as our "study" passage. We will return to it time and again from different angles, asking different questions and employing different methods as we study.

In the following two lessons, we will get into the context and setting of Ruth. Don't worry too much about that today.

The fairly obvious but often overlooked first step in studying a Bible passage is to read it. The book of Ruth is only four chapters, so I want us to read it all in one sitting. I have provided you with two different versions of the book of Ruth. They are included at the end of this lesson.

2. Read through Ruth in the Christian Standard Bible (CSB) slowly. Read it thoughtfully, carefully, and out loud if that helps you focus. Underline anything that stands out to you. If something raises a question in you, write it down in the margin. Interact with it. (You may also choose to listen to the Word of God if that seems more doable. I recommend downloading the Bible app, which will allow you to press "play" and listen to the selected passage.)

3. If you had to summarize the book of Ruth in 1-3 sentences, what would you say the book is about?

Recall from our lesson that translations range from formal (word for word) translations to functional (thought for thought) translations. While neither is inherently "better" than the other, they have different strengths and weaknesses.

4. According to the chart from your listening guide at the beginning of this lesson, where does the CSB fall on the translation spectrum?
5. The other translation of Ruth that I have provided for you is the New American Standard Version (NASB). Take some time now to read through the book of Ruth in this translation. As you do, mark any differences that stand out to you. Is there any place where you would say the translation changes the meaning of the text?
6. Look again at the chart of translations. Where does the NASB fall on the spectrum?
7. As a bonus assignment, use a website (I recommend Blue Letter Bible) to look up Ruth in The Message translation. The Message is a *very* functional translation. Read or skim through Ruth in this translation. How would you describe the difference between this experience and your experience reading Ruth in the CSB or NASB?

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

The following questions are meant to help you consider and apply the points we've discussed about the Bible's trustworthiness and reliability.

The book of Ruth was originally included in the Hebrew Bible and would have been part of the scriptures that Jesus referenced during His earthly life (John 5:39). Ruth has been accepted as scripture by the Jewish people, by the early church, and by the church throughout history.

If we believe that the book of Ruth belongs in the Bible and that the Bible is the Word of God, then we believe that the book of Ruth itself was inspired by God.

Remember that the Holy Spirit's work of *inspiration* is complete because the Bible is complete, but the Holy Spirit's ongoing work of *illumination* is to help us understand what God is saying through His written Word as we seek to know Him in the Bible.

8. How does the Holy Spirit's work of inspiration invite you to interact differently with the book of Ruth than you would with a non-biblical historical work?

9. How do you think we should respond to the idea of illumination? How do you understand the balance between your responsibility as you read the Bible and your dependence on the Spirit's work?

We discussed the idea of a plain and clear reading of the text, reading the Bible the way we would read other works. The book of Ruth is a narrative and is presented as historical.

10. Do you generally believe that the Bible is true? Do you believe that the story of Ruth is true? Why or why not?

11. What truth does this story of Ruth communicate to you about who God is? What are some of His character traits that you observe as you see Him working in this story?

Wrap Up

N.T. Wright wrote "the phrase 'authority of scripture' can make Christian sense only if it is a shorthand for the 'authority of the triune God, exercised somehow *through scripture*.'"²

12. How do you see God in authority over this story of Ruth? How did He bring about His plan within the life of Ruth herself?

² Wright, N.T. *Scripture and the Authority of God*. 2005. Page 21.

13. How did God's actions in Ruth's life affect His overarching plan to send the Messiah? (Consider Ruth 4:17-22 and Matthew 1:5-6, 16.)

14. Is there any area in your own life where you don't currently see God's provision or faithfulness but want to trust Him for it? How does observing God's faithfulness to Ruth and Naomi affect your trust of who God is?

15. In the space below, bring your doubts and needs before the Lord and ask Him to open your eyes to see His faithfulness and provision when He moves on your behalf the way He did for Ruth and Naomi.