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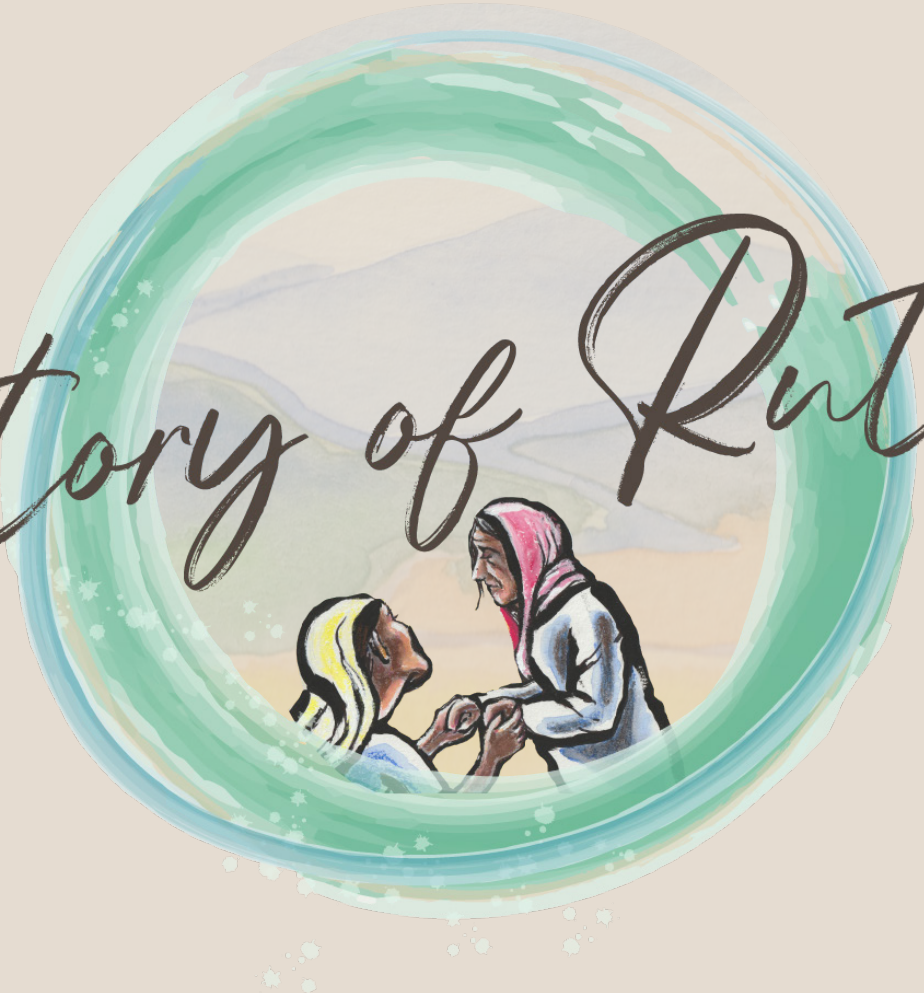
## RUTH

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# Story of Ruth



## **INTRODUCTION TO RUTH**

Ruth is a delightful, heart-felt, heart-warming, and deeply satisfying book. It is a down-to-earth tale about feast and famine, life and death, sojourn and rest, bitterness and joy. It begins with empty stomachs and profound loss, as Ruth and Naomi find themselves outside the blessings of God. It ends with restoration and the birth of a child, as a woman who was outside finds herself welcomed in. It is a simple love story that takes us deep into the purposes of God, and it gives us a refreshing picture of his covenantal love at work in the struggles of life. We want our own lives to have significance as we live them in the presence of God, and at times, because we might not have a mountain-top encounter like Elijah, or see miraculous healings, or witness the dramatic defeat of evil, God's purposes can feel hidden, his presence distant. The book of Ruth reminds us that God is involved and in control of life's ordinary affairs. He works through the everyday faithfulness of everyday people to bring about his plan of salvation, meant for the blessing and restoration of all peoples.

The story of Ruth picks up where the book of Judges left off, a book that ends on a terrible note of sexual violence and civil war, in a time when "every man did what was right in his own eyes" (Judges 21:25). Against this dark backdrop of rebellion and sin, the characters we meet in the little town of Bethlehem shine forth as remarkable examples of what it looks like to walk in covenantal faithfulness with the Lord. In a sense, the book of Ruth answers two very important questions: what will God do about Israel's rebellion in Judges?; and: are there any left in Israel who follow the Lord? Despite Israel's persistent sin, we see that God does remain faithful, and out of his faithful provision in the midst of Ruth and Boaz's faithfulness, restoration comes, and Obed is born. From the line of Obed, David will be born. And from the line of David, a messiah will be born, the redeemer of the world. Even in the midst of the darkness, God's purposes cannot be thwarted.

### **A FEW THEMES IN RUTH**

- Provision (empty/full, famine/harvest, fields, land)
- Family (widow, marriage, children, genealogy)
- Covenant (blessing, loving kindness, inheritance, redeemer)
- Refuge/rest
- Redemption
- Outsiders becoming insiders
- Love (Hesed)
- Levirate marriage

## **THINGS TO WATCH OUT FOR**

The historical sections of the Old Testament are famous for “showing” rather than “telling.” The narrator, for example, rarely tells us what to think about a person, rather they give us a complex portrayal of that person, and then we have to make up our own minds. We are never explicitly told, for example, why Ruth decides to stick with Naomi through thick and thin, or why Elijah has a breakdown after his victory on Mount Carmel. We might have good ideas, but like all human behaviour, there is complexity and fuzziness.

One important thing to watch out for when reading these stories are descriptive details. Details in Old Testament narrative are never superfluous, so when something is mentioned, we need to pay attention. In Ruth, for example, the first chapter finishes by telling us that “they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest” (Ruth 1:22). As readers, we need to ask ourselves: Why did the narrator include that detail? How does it relate to the larger story? What are we expecting as readers? Along with descriptive details, it’s also important to pay attention to names, places, repeated words and phrases, interruptions or changes in style, and connections to the rest of the Bible.

Lastly, stories in the Old Testament rarely conclude with a tidy moral. The storyteller is more interested in showing us who God is, and how he relates to his covenant people, rather than in giving us easy life lessons. It is up to the reader to carefully discern what is being revealed in the story, both through what is said, and through what has been left unsaid. The story you are reading is a story you are being invited into. In this story, who is God? Who are his people? What is the problem? What does it mean to be in relationship with this God?



## RUTH 1

The opening chapter of the Book of Ruth draws us quickly into a story of deep suffering. We travel with a family who leave the land of Israel in order to survive a famine. Distressing losses follow and the women are left with a major decision: Where will they go? Returning home, the mother Naomi has been tragically transformed: from sweetness to bitterness, from fullness to emptiness. She and her daughter-in-law are without hope, without family, and without protection. What will happen to these two women? How can their situation possibly change?

The Book of Ruth is a beloved story of redemption. Simple though the story may seem, there are layers of depth waiting to be discovered for the attentive reader. The narrator subtly and masterfully weaves together every detail in order to take us by the hand, and lead us into the heart of the matter. These details also alert us to the fact that this short story of one family is part of a greater story for all people: the story of redemption that shapes the whole Bible and eventually leads to Christ. There is far more at stake here than the events that took place in a small town thousands of years ago! Pray that the Lord, by his Spirit, will draw you into this story of redemption and love, and pray that the Book of Ruth will help you see what it means to be redeemed by Christ.



## RUTH ONE

### STUDY 1

#### ACT 1

In the days when the judges ruled there was a famine in the land, and a man of Bethlehem in Judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons. 2 The name of the man was Elimelech and the name of his wife Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah. They went into the country of Moab and remained there. 3 But Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died, and she was left with her two sons. 4 These took Moabite wives; the name of the one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth. They lived there about ten years, 5 and both Mahlon and Chilion died, so that the woman was left without her two sons and her husband.

#### ACT 2

6 Then she arose with her daughters-in-law to return from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the fields of Moab that the LORD had visited his people and given them food. 7 So she set out from the place where she was with her two daughters-in-law, and they went on the way to return to the land of Judah. 8 But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go, return each of you to her mother's house. May the Lord deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me. 9 The LORD grant that you may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband!" Then she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept. 10 And they said to her, "No, we will return with you to your people." 11 But Naomi said, "Turn back, my daughters; why will you go with me? Have I yet sons in my womb that they may become your husbands? 12 Turn back, my daughters; go your way, for I am too old to have a husband. If I should say I have hope, even if I should have a husband this night and should bear sons, 13 would you therefore wait till they were grown? Would you therefore refrain from marrying? No, my daughters, for it is exceedingly bitter to me for your sake that the hand of the Lord has gone out against me." 14 Then they lifted up their voices and wept again. And Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her. 15 And she said, "See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law." 16 But 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. 17 Where 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." 18 And when Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more.

#### ACT 3

19 So the two of them went on until they came to Bethlehem. And when they came to Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them. And the women said, "Is this Naomi?" 20 She said to them, "Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. 21 I went away full, and the Lord has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi, when the Lord has testified against me and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me?" 22 So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabite her daughter-in-law with her, who returned from the country of Moab. And they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest.

## STEP 1. WHAT DOES IT SAY?

### A Pray

### B Look Closely At

- Repetitions, Contrasts, Surprises
- Big Bible Words
- Commands
- Promises
- Characters
- Dialogue – who is talking to whom?
- Setting (timeline and place) – does it change?

### C Look Structurally

- What kind of writing is this? (eg. narrative, poetry, parable, teaching)
- How does the plot unfold? (Conflict? Climax? Resolution?)

#### NEED SOME HELP?

If you need some help with steps 1-2, check out the study notes on page 13.

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### D A few questions to consider

- What do we learn about the main characters in this chapter? (Pay attention to their names in particular. Refer to Study Notes for help)
- Pay attention to the places mentioned in this chapter. What is their significance? Use the Study Notes if you need help.
  - Bethlehem (Ephrathites)
  - Judah
  - Moab
- We have provided an example of how to break up the narrative into scenes. Follow the three-act plot line with its crises, climaxes, and conclusion. What do you notice?

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## STUDY NOTES

### 1:1 “In the days when the judges ruled”

This is a classic beginning used by Old Testament authors to alert us to the fact that they are writing about historical events. This story opens on an ominous note. The days of the judges, told in the book of Judges, was a time of nationwide spiritual failure, and the book ends with the note: “In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (Judg 21:25). The Book of Ruth, in part, acts as a transition from the period of the judges to the period of the monarchy, which begins in 1 Samuel. The Book of Ruth answers the question: How on earth did God raise up a righteous king from such a time of terrible wickedness?

### 1:1 “There was a famine in the land”

This detail should also raise alarm bells for us. God had promised to Israel the gift of rain and abundant harvest as a sign of his blessing and, on the other hand, drought and famine as a sign of his judgement (Deut 28:15-24). These promises are specific outworkings of the covenant God made with Abraham. This chapter and the entire Book of Ruth are full of allusions to the promises made by God in Genesis 12:1-3. Specifically, he promised to make Abraham:

- A People who would dwell in his...
- Place and there they would experience his...
- Blessing which was rest and abundant life.

### 1:4 “They took for themselves Moabite wives.”

One of the consequences of Elimelech’s decision to leave the land of Israel and then remain there is that his sons had to take wives from the Moabite nation. In Exodus 34:11-16 and Deuteronomy 7:3-5, the Lord warned against taking foreign wives because they would turn the hearts of sons away from the Lord to serve other gods. As readers, we are not expecting anything good from Ruth and Orpah.

### 1:8 “May the LORD deal kindly...”

Usually “kindly” (Hebrew *hesed*) is translated as “steadfast love” or “loving kindness.” Naomi uses this word first, and it lays the foundation for everything that happens in this book. Daniel Block, commenting on *hesed*, says: “It is one of Yahweh’s most treasured characteristics.... Its meaning cannot be translated into one English word. This is a strong relational term that wraps up in itself an entire cluster of concepts, all positive attributes of God: love, mercy, grace, kindness, goodness, benevolence, loyalty, covenant faithfulness; in short, that quality that moves a person to act for the benefit of another without respect to the advantage it might bring to the one who expresses it. (Refer also to the Study Notes in Study #4).

**1:21 “I went away full...”** The emptiness spoken of by Naomi is the opposite of the blessing that the LORD had promised to his people. Death and not life, famine and not abundance, barrenness and not fruitfulness, being “outside” and not “inside”; these come from being away from the LORD and his promises.

### What’s In A Name?

The meaning of names is often significant in the Old Testament, though they are usually left untranslated in our English Bibles:

- Elimelech - “my God is king”
- Naomi - “pleasantness”
- Mara - “bitter” (Note that the narrator refuses to use this name for Naomi throughout the book and continues to call her by her first name. This bitterness will not be the last word in her life, even if she cannot possibly see it now).
- Mahlon - “weakling”
- Chilion - “frailty”
- Orpah - unknown meaning, maybe “adorned with thick hair?”
- Ruth - “friend, companion”

## Location, location, location!

Where things take place is an important part of understanding the context and the deeper significance of the events.

- Bethlehem = “house of bread”. We are meant to feel the irony that there is a famine in the place of “bread”. In v.6 when Naomi hears that the LORD has visited his people, she hears that he has given them “bread”. King David will come from Bethlehem (1 Sam 16:1). Bethlehem becomes the place of redemptive hope with the promised birth of God’s king:  
“But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah,  
who are too little to be among the clans of Judah  
From you shall come forth for me  
One who is to be ruler in Israel  
Whose coming forth is from of old  
From ancient days”  
(Micah 5:2-4)

And of course, these promises find their fulfillment in David’s descendant and heir, Jesus (Matthew 2:1) Ephraim is another name for those who come from Bethlehem. The name itself ironically means “fruitful”

- Judah is the tribe in which Bethlehem is located and from this tribe it has been promised that the king will come (Genesis 49:10).
- Moab. The fact that this family travels to the land of Moab should also raise concern for the reader. Daniel Block in his commentary identifies five reasons not to go to Moab:
  - They come from the line of Lot and from his incestuous relationship with his daughter (Gen 19).
  - The Moabites resisted the Israelites’ peaceful passage through their land (Numbers 22-24) and sought to curse the nation of Israel.
  - The Moabite women seduced the men of Israel who married them despite the Lord’s warning (Numbers 25).
  - Because of this Moabites were excluded from the assembly of the Lord (Deuteronomy 23:3-6).
  - Eglon, King of Moab has recently oppressed Israel (Judges 3:15-30).



## RUTH 2

In the previous study, we left Naomi and Ruth in a difficult place. They were grieving the loss of husbands and sons, and suffering from famine and poverty. But even though Ruth belonged in Moab, she would not give up on Naomi. Hearing rumours that God had brought food to Bethlehem, Naomi had planned to head back alone but Ruth, out of love for her mother-in-law and her God, had begged to accompany her and made covenant with her. Now that they are in Bethlehem, Ruth lives as a stranger in a strange land.

In this passage, all the events happen in a single day of Ruth's life. We follow her from home to work and back home again but, between morning and evening, she gets lucky—or, rather, does she come under God's providence?



## RUTH TWO

### STUDY 2

#### ACT 1

Now Naomi had a relative of her husband's, a worthy man of the clan of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz. 2 And Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, "Let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain after him in whose sight I shall find favor." And she said to her, "Go, my daughter." 3 So she set out and went and gleaned in the field after the reapers, and she happened to come to the part of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the clan of Elimelech.

#### ACT 2

4 And behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem. And he said to the reapers, "The LORD be with you!" And they answered, "The LORD bless you." 5 Then Boaz said to his young man who was in charge of the reapers, "Whose young woman is this?" 6 And the servant who was in charge of the reapers answered, "She is the young Moabite woman, who came back with Naomi from the country of Moab. 7 She said, 'Please let me glean and gather among the sheaves after the reapers.' So she came, and she has continued from early morning until now, except for a short rest." 8 Then Boaz said to Ruth, "Now, listen, my daughter, do not go to glean in another field or leave this one, but keep close to my young women. 9 Let your eyes be on the field that they are reaping, and go after them. Have I not charged the young men not to touch you? And when you are thirsty, go to the vessels and drink what the young men have drawn." 10 Then she fell on her face, bowing to the ground, and said to him, "Why have I found favor in your eyes, that you should take notice of me, since I am a foreigner?" 11 But Boaz answered her, "All that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband has been fully told to me, and how you left your father and mother and your native land and came to a people that you did not know before. 12 The LORD repay you for what you have done, and a full reward be given you by the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge!" 13 Then she said, "I have found favor in your eyes, my lord, for you have comforted me and spoken kindly to your servant, though I am not one of your servants."

#### ACT 3

14 And at mealtime Boaz said to her, "Come here and eat some bread and dip your morsel in the wine." So she sat beside the reapers, and he passed to her roasted grain. And she ate until she was satisfied, and she had some left over. 15 When she rose to glean, Boaz instructed his young men, saying, "Let her glean even among the sheaves, and do not reproach her. 16 And also pull out some from the bundles for her and leave it for her to glean, and do not rebuke her." 17 So she gleaned in the field until evening. Then she beat out what she had gleaned, and it was about an ephah of barley.



## **ACT 4**

18 And she took it up and went into the city. Her mother-in-law saw what she had gleaned. She also brought out and gave her what food she had left over after being satisfied. 19 And her mother-in-law said to her, "Where did you glean today? And where have you worked? Blessed be the man who took notice of you." So she told her mother-in-law with whom she had worked and said, "The man's name with whom I worked today is Boaz." 20 And Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, "May he be blessed by the LORD, whose kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead!" Naomi also said to her, "The man is a close relative of ours, one of our redeemers." 21 And Ruth the Moabite said, "Besides, he said to me, 'You shall keep close by my young men until they have finished all my harvest.'" 22 And Naomi said to Ruth, her daughter-in-law, "It is good, my daughter, that you go out with his young women, lest in another field you be assaulted." 23 So she kept close to the young women of Boaz, gleaning until the end of the barley and wheat harvests. And she lived with her mother-in-law.

## STEP 1. WHAT DOES IT SAY?

### A Pray

### B Look Closely At

- Repetitions, Contrasts, Surprises
- Big Bible Words
- Commands
- Promises
- Characters
- Dialogue – who is talking to whom?
- Setting (timeline and place) – does it change?

### C Look Structurally

- What kind of writing is this? (eg. narrative, poetry, parable, teaching)
- How does the plot unfold? (Conflict? Climax? Resolution?)

#### NEED SOME HELP?

If you need some help with steps 1-2, check out the study notes on page 23..

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### D A few questions to consider

- Who are the main characters and how are they identified in this chapter? What do we learn about their characterization from their dialogue and actions?
- We've divided the passage into scenes for you. How does the narrator frame the story, and what is the main event at the centre? (See Study Notes if you need help with this.)
- How do the two accounts of Ruth's story in the passage (the servant's and Boaz's) differ?

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## STUDY NOTES

### 2:1 “A worthy man of the clan of Elimelech”

Both Boaz and Ruth are characterized by this word “worthy” (cf. 3:11) It comes from the Hebrew word *hayil*, meaning “excellence of character”: strong, worthy, mighty, heroic. The word is often used to describe warriors but is also used to describe the “excellent wife” in Proverbs 31:1. She is one who fears the Lord, works hard, prepares for the future, and provides for her family. In the Hebrew arrangement of the Old Testament, Proverbs comes directly before Ruth, so we get a poem about a “worthy woman” followed by the story of a “worthy woman.” In Ruth, we see people obeying and living into the wisdom of the LORD.

### 2:2 “Let me go to the field and glean...”

Gleaning was an agricultural practice used to ensure that every kernel of grain was harvested. A gleaner would follow the harvesters, picking up grain that was left behind or that fell out of the bundle. God’s law commanded that the leftover grain missed in the first sweep of the field didn’t belong to the property owner, but was for those without land or the means to provide for themselves: the servants, foreigners, widows, and orphans. See Leviticus 19:9-10, 23:22, and Deut 24:19, 16:9-16 to read about the laws around gleaning.

### 2:4 “And behold Boaz came from Bethlehem”

That Boaz is the close relative of the clan of Elimelech is very important for the story. Notably, he is also the son of Rahab, also a foreigner, who by faith had joined the people of God and helped them take the city of Jericho. Boaz’s first words are “The LORD be with you!” This bodes well, and his reapers respond “The LORD bless you.” His second line of dialogue is “Whose young woman is this?”

### 2:23 “Gleaning until the end of the barley and wheat harvests”

The harvest season in Israel was a time of abundance and several of Israel’s festivals occurred during the harvest as a reminder of God’s abundant provision for his people. God’s law commanded that people were meant to specifically look after widows, orphans, and other outsiders. They were to invite them into their homes to eat with them. Provision and hospitality were deeply integrated with festival feasting in God’s law and purposes for society.

### 2:9 “Have I not charged the young men not to touch you?”

Unattached young women working in the fields faced many dangers in the ancient Near East. In this passage, Boaz has told his young men not to touch her or harass her. As a Moabite woman, Ruth would have been in danger of both physical and verbal abuse. This is a worrying sign of the state of life generally in Israel as the book of Judges attests.

### 2:14 “Come here and eat some bread...”

Mealtime in Israel was more than just eating together: it had important social and communal implications. The meal in this passage demonstrates a clear progression of Ruth from outsider to insider, bringing her literally and relationally nearer and nearer to Boaz, her host. He first invites her to come near, then to eat the bread he provided, and then dip it in the sauce; finally he himself serves her until she is full, leaving her with leftovers to bring back to Naomi. A remarkable example of hesed!

### 2:21 “...one of our redeemers.”

The Kinsman-redeemer is a term that we only find in the book of Ruth. However, similar types of legal obligations and arrangements can be found in the laws of redeeming the land (Lev 25) and of Levirate marriage (Deut 25). In Ruth, the Kinsman-redeemer is the close relative who purchases Naomi’s deceased husband’s property, and also takes Ruth as his wife to carry on Elimelech’s lineage. The idea behind was both to support the poor and also to keep the wealthy accountable. In doing so, Israelites with less could have the assurance that the land allotted to them by God would remain in the family. It also protected against amassing large quantities of land and wealth beyond the family allotment, leaving others with nothing.

Nowhere except in Ruth does redeeming the land involve marriage to continue the line of a deceased man. Levirate marriage, however, (Deut 25) involves a close relative marrying a widow. Her first son would bear her deceased husband's name and thus continue the line. At a time when there was no developed understanding of life after death, a person's existence was thought to continue through his children and through their continued connection to his portion of the tribal lands given by God. To lose that connection was unthinkable. So, according to Deut 25:5-10, when a man died without leaving a son, his widow was forbidden to marry outside the family. Her husband's brother was to "take her as his wife and perform the duty of a husband's brother". The first son that she bore would be counted as a son of the dead brother, who would then inherit his property and establish his name. The kinsman-redeemer in Ruth seems to be something of a combination of these two laws. The redeemer also carries theological significance, as the title passes on to Ruth's son in chapter 4.

**2:12 "Under whose wings you have come to take refuge!"** This image of a bird protecting her young is used to describe the protection and shelter of the Lord for Israel throughout the Old Testament, e.g. Genesis 1:2, Exodus 19:4, Deuteronomy 32:10-12, Isaiah 31:5. It is a regular image in the Psalms as well (Psa 17:8, 36:7, 57:1 etc.)





## RUTH 3

### *Last study...*

... Ruth had gone out to collect leftover grain from among the fields and happened to pick from Boaz's field. Boaz was gracious to Ruth and generous, giving her extra grain to bring home to Naomi, but he had not taken full responsibility for her. On hearing Ruth's report of her encounter with Boaz, Naomi praised the Lord telling Ruth that he is one of their 'redeemers', a concept first introduced in Ruth 2:20.

### *This passage...*

... Naomi and Ruth have a shot at redemption. They are both widows with no land, no children, and little money, and forced to glean leftover wheat from the fields. Their future looks bleak but they have an idea. They plan to ask Boaz, a stand-up guy in a corrupt culture, to fulfill the vow of kinsman redeemer, which would bring them out of poverty, give them land, and save the family line. His choice will make or break their situation. Naomi and Ruth are at his mercy.



## RUTH THREE

### STUDY 3

#### ACT 1

1 Then Naomi, her mother-in-law, said to her, “My daughter, should I not seek rest for you, that it may be well with you? 2 Is not Boaz our relative, with whose young women you were? See, he is winnowing barley tonight at the threshing floor. 3 Wash therefore and anoint yourself, and put on your cloak and go down to the threshing floor, but do not make yourself known to the man until he has finished eating and drinking. 4 But when he lies down, observe the place where he lies. Then go and uncover his feet and lie down, and he will tell you what to do.” 5 And she replied, “All that you say I will do.”

#### ACT 2

6 So she went down to the threshing floor and did just as her mother-in-law had commanded her. 7 And when Boaz had eaten and drunk, and his heart was merry, he went to lie down at the end of the heap of grain. Then she came softly and uncovered his feet and lay down. 8 At midnight the man was startled and turned over, and behold, a woman lay at his feet! 9 He said, “Who are you?” And she answered, “I am Ruth, your servant. Spread your wings over your servant, for you are a redeemer.” 10 And he said, “May you be blessed by the LORD, my daughter. You have made this last kindness greater than the first in that you have not gone after young men, whether poor or rich. 11 And now, my daughter, do not fear. I will do for you all that you ask, for all my fellow townsmen know that you are a worthy woman. 12 And now it is true that I am a redeemer. Yet there is a redeemer nearer than I. 13 Remain tonight, and in the morning, if he will redeem you, good; let him do it. But if he is not willing to redeem you, then, as the LORD lives, I will redeem you. Lie down until the morning.” 14 So she lay at his feet until the morning, but arose before one could recognize another. 15 And he said, “Let it not be known that the woman came to the threshing floor.” And he said, “Bring the garment you are wearing and hold it out.” So she held it, and he measured out six measures of barley and put it on her.

#### ACT 3

Then she went into the city. 16 And when she came to her mother-in-law, she said, “How did you fare, my daughter?” Then she told her all that the man had done for her, 17 saying, “These six measures of barley he gave to me, for he said to me, ‘You must not go back empty-handed to your mother-in-law.’” 18 She replied, “Wait, my daughter, until you learn how the matter turns out, for the man will not rest but will settle the matter today.”

## STEP 1. WHAT DOES IT SAY?

### A Pray

### B Look Closely At

- Repetitions, Contrasts, Surprises
- Big Bible Words
- Commands
- Promises
- Characters
- Dialogue – who is talking to whom?
- Setting (timeline and place) – does it change?

### C Look Structurally

- What kind of writing is this? (eg. narrative, poetry, parable, teaching)
- How does the plot unfold? (Conflict? Climax? Resolution?)

#### NEED SOME HELP?

If you need some help with steps 1-2, check out the study notes on page 32..

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### D A few questions to consider

- What do you notice about the dialogue of our three main characters in this passage? Who gets the most lines of dialogue? What does that tell us about their actions/behaviour/motivations?
- Do you notice any repeated words in the dialogue and the narration? What are they? The words/phrases to focus on in this passage: “My daughter,” “lay/lie down at his feet”, “All that you say I will do”, redeem/redeemer, threshing floor, servant, blessed, “Spread your wings over your servant.” (See Study notes.)

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## STEP 2. WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

### NEED SOME HELP?

If you need some help with steps 1-2, check out the study notes on page 32.

### A Look at the context

- Read the passage immediately before and after
- How does the context help us understand the meaning of the text?
- Look up cross references

### B A few questions to consider

- Read Leviticus 25:23-28, Deuteronomy 10:17-22, and Exodus 22:21-24. What might these passages tell us about the special responsibility that Boaz has regarding Ruth and Naomi?
- As kinsman redeemer, Boaz must take under his care both the land and the widow of his deceased kin so that the family line may flourish and not die out. How does this information help us understand her actions in Ruth 3:7, and his response in Ruth 3:10?



### C What's the Main Idea?

### D Stop to Pray

Thank God for all he has revealed to you, ask him to help you see Jesus more clearly and love him more deeply through the next steps of your study.







## STUDY NOTES

**3:2 “Is not Boaz our relative?:** One might think that it is inappropriately forward of Naomi to suggest that Ruth approach Boaz in this way, as though Naomi plotted with Ruth to entice Boaz. However, Naomi’s suggestion is rooted in the dynamic of levirate marriage (Deut 25). Refer to the study note on 2:21 from last week’s study for more information.

**3:9 “Spread your wings over your servant”**

This phrase might seem awkwardly poetic but is actually a play on words. In Hebrew *kanaph* can denote a wing or the edge of a garment and is connected with marital intimacy (cf. Ezek 16:8). A more natural translation to our ear might be “spread your cloak over me,” but then we would miss the significant connection between Ruth’s request for marriage here and her desire to find refuge in the LORD (2:12, with the same word *kanaph*). Ruth is taking a bold step by offering herself to Boaz in this way, but this is not a midnight dalliance, as Ruth makes clear when she asks Boaz to step into his role as redeemer.

**3:12 “Yet there is a redeemer nearer than I.”**

The conditions of Levirate marriage required that the closest brother of a man step in to provide for a widow. Naomi has other kin through Elimelech who is more closely related than Boaz so the responsibility falls to that man first.

**3:13 “As the LORD lives, I will redeem you.”**

Redemption in the context of the Old Testament usually refers to God’s deliverance of his people from oppression. As a consequence, the people of God were commanded to practice mini-redemptions by taking responsibility for each other’s welfare. This was the role of the kinsman-redeemer who would restore a family’s rightful inheritance back to them.

This basic dynamic also points to Christ as our ultimate kinsman-redeemer. We are both delivered from oppression and transferred into the family of God, so that we might receive the inheritance of eternal life. Hebrews 9:15 says, “Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant.” Similarly, in Galatians 4:4-6 we read, “But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’”

**3:14 “So she lay at his feet until morning...”**

Boaz asks Ruth to spend the night, making his commitment to her clear while still maintaining propriety. In this culture, lying at someone’s feet is an act of submission rather than sexual provocation. Scripture is not shy about describing sex when it does in fact occur, so there is no need to read between the lines concerning the night on the threshing floor. Though the relationship remains unconsummated, there is most certainly the tension of anticipation in this scene. In last week’s study we considered the significance of the fact that this book, in the Hebrew ordering of the Old Testament, comes right after the “excellent wife” of Proverbs 31. It is also worth noting that the Song of Songs immediately follows the Book of Ruth, with its picture of romantic love.



# Ruth // Elizah



## RUTH FOUR

Chapter 4 brings to a surprising close the saga of Naomi, Ruth and Boaz and ties up many of the themes developed in the first three chapters. Ruth's hesed (See Study Notes) has been evident throughout the book but nowhere more so than during her very risky night on the threshing floor. She acted in covenant faithfulness and expected no less from Boaz. And in response, Boaz promised redemption.

Through all the drama of this book, we are reminded that even "in the days when the judges ruled," God was never without faithful people to carry forward his purposes. Ruth's trust in the promises of God was so absolute that it moved Boaz, a good and faithful man in his own right, to do something quite extraordinary. And the result would have consequences that reverberate through millennia.



## RUTH FOUR

### STUDY 4

#### ACT 1

1 Now Boaz had gone up to the gate and sat down there. And behold, the redeemer, of whom Boaz had spoken, came by. So Boaz said, "Turn aside, friend; sit down here." And he turned aside and sat down. 2 And he took ten men of the elders of the city and said, "Sit down here." So they sat down. 3 Then he said to the redeemer, "Naomi, who has come back from the country of Moab, is selling the parcel of land that belonged to our relative Elimelech. 4 So I thought I would tell you of it and say, 'Buy it in the presence of those sitting here and in the presence of the elders of my people.' If you will redeem it, redeem it. But if you will not, tell me, that I may know, for there is no one besides you to redeem it, and I come after you." And he said, "I will redeem it." 5 Then Boaz said, "The day you buy the field from the hand of Naomi, you also acquire Ruth the Moabite, the widow of the dead, in order to perpetuate the name of the dead in his inheritance." 6 Then the redeemer said, "I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I impair my own inheritance. Take my right of redemption yourself, for I cannot redeem it." 7 Now this was the custom in former times in Israel concerning redeeming and exchanging: to confirm a transaction, the one drew off his sandal and gave it to the other, and this was the manner of attesting in Israel. 8 So when the redeemer said to Boaz, "Buy it for yourself," he drew off his sandal. 9 Then Boaz said to the elders and all the people, "You are witnesses this day that I have bought from the hand of Naomi all that belonged to Elimelech and all that belonged to Chilion and to Mahlon. 10 Also Ruth the Moabite, the widow of Mahlon, I have bought to be my wife, to perpetuate the name of the dead in his inheritance, that the name of the dead may not be cut off from among his brothers and from the gate of his native place. You are witnesses this day." 11 Then all the people who were at the gate and the elders said, "We are witnesses. May the Lord make the woman, who is coming into your house, like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the house of Israel. May you act worthily in Ephrathah and be renowned in Bethlehem, 12 and may your house be like the house of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah, because of the offspring that the Lord will give you by this young woman."

#### ACT 2

13 So Boaz took Ruth, and she became his wife. And he went in to her, and the Lord gave her conception, and she bore a son. 14 Then the women said to Naomi, "Blessed be the Lord, who has not left you this day without a redeemer, and may his name be renowned in Israel! 15 He shall be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age, for your daughter-in-law who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons, has given birth to him." 16 Then Naomi took the child and laid him on her lap and became his nurse. 17 And the women of the neighborhood gave him a name, saying, "A son has been born to Naomi." They named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David. 18

#### ACT 3

Now these are the generations of Perez: Perez fathered Hezron, 19 Hezron fathered Ram, Ram fathered Amminadab, 20 Amminadab fathered Nahshon, Nahshon fathered Salmon, 21 Salmon fathered Boaz, Boaz fathered Obed, 22 Obed fathered Jesse, and Jesse fathered David.

## STEP 1. WHAT DOES IT SAY?

### A Pray

### B Look Closely At

- Repetitions, Contrasts, Surprises
- Big Bible Words
- Commands
- Promises
- Characters
- Dialogue – who is talking to whom?
- Setting (timeline and place) – does it change?

### C Look Structurally

- What kind of writing is this? (eg. narrative, poetry, parable, teaching)
- How does the plot unfold? (Conflict? Climax? Resolution?)

#### NEED SOME HELP?

If you need some help with steps 1-2, check out the study notes on page 40.

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### D A few questions to consider

- Why were the elders and the people gathered at the city gate in vv.1-12, and why were witnesses needed?
- What reason does Boaz give for redeeming (“buying”, v.10) Ruth? (See Notes on Kinsman-Redeemer and Levirate Marriage.) What “inheritance” is he referring to?
- What do we learn about Obed?
- The English word “love” is only used once in Ruth (4:15). Who is the subject and who is the object of that love? And what evidence is there of that love in the book?

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## STUDY NOTES

### ***Hesed***

We've run into this word before but it is such an important word for the book of Ruth that we'll mention it again. The Hebrew word *hesed* has been described as one of the richest, most theologically insightful terms in the Old Testament, and it is at the heart of everything good that happens in Ruth. There is no single English word that even comes close to adequately translating *hesed*. Depending on context, it has been variously translated using one or more expressions such as steadfast love, faithfulness, kindness, divine favour, covenant loyalty, unfailing love, devotion, goodness, loving kindness. It always has to do with mercy, goodness, kindness and love and it is always exceptional and surprising and completely free. *Hesed* is found three times in Ruth explicitly, once translated "kindly" (1:8) and twice translated "kindness" (2:20; 3:10). In 1:8, Naomi called for the LORD's *hesed* to Ruth and Orpah because of their *hesed* to their husbands and Naomi; 2:20 refers to the LORD's *hesed* to Naomi, her dead husband and sons, and to Ruth; 3:10 refers to Ruth's escalating her *hesed* to her deceased husband by seeking marriage within her family and by not marrying for sexual love or money. While the word *hesed* is used only three times in Ruth, its presence is felt throughout the book, perhaps most notably in this stirring conclusion.

### **4:1 "...and behold, the redeemer...came"**

The Law of Moses required that the land given by God to the Israelites not be permanently sold. If the land was sold, usually because the landholder found himself destitute or in debt, a close relative of the landholder—called a "kinsman-redeemer"—was obligated to redeem it, and the person temporarily in possession of the land was obligated to permit the redemption. The rationale for the redemption of the land is set out in Lev 25:23 where the LORD says: "The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine". The LORD is the landowner; Israel lives there by his grace only.

Similar provisions applied to an Israelite who became enslaved, again usually because he sold himself into slavery as a way of resolving debt. He could not be permanently enslaved because he belonged to God. As with the sale of land, the restoration was to take place either through redemption by the kinsman-redeemer, or if that wasn't possible, by self-redemption (usually through an inheritance), or if that wasn't possible, by Jubilee (Lev 25:47-54). But in the end, because both the land and the people belonged to God, they needed to be redeemed and restored.

### **4:5 "You also acquire Ruth the Moabite..."**

At a time when there was no developed understanding of life after death, a person's existence was thought to continue through his children and through their continued connection to his portion of the tribal lands given by God. To lose that connection was unthinkable. So, according to Deut 25:5-10, when a man died without leaving a son, his widow was forbidden to marry outside the family. Her husband's brother was to "take her as his wife and perform the duty of a husband's brother." The first son that she bore would be counted as a son of the dead brother, who would then inherit his property and establish his name. This was known as levirate marriage. There is no exact precedent in the Law of Moses for the custom we are witnessing at the gates of Bethlehem (i.e. neither Leviticus or Deuteronomy stipulate that the redeemer must marry the widow) but it is consistent with the principles of redemption and levirate marriage.

### **4:11 "...like Rachel and Leah..."**

Rachel and Leah were the founding mothers of Israel. They and their servants, Bilhah and Zilpah (whose children in some way also became the children of Rachel and Leah), bore Jacob twelve sons from whom, in turn, sprang the twelve tribes of Israel.

### **4:12 "...like the house of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah..."**

Daniel Block offers this in his commentary on Ruth:

"This most celebrated narrative of levirate obligation and betrayal also involved a widow whose husband, Er, had died without producing an heir. Failing to get Er's brother, Onan, to fulfill his levirate obligation and despairing of waiting for Shelah, another younger brother, to grow up, Tamar pretended to be a prostitute and tricked Judah, her own father-in-law, into having sexual intercourse with her. As unlikely as it may seem, she conceived and eventually bore twin sons, Perez and Zerah. Together with Shelah these two sons become the ancestors of the



tribe of Judah (Gen 46:12; Num 26:20; etc.) Of these three, Perez's descendants seem to have played the most significant role in Israel's history, but Perez is mentioned here because he was the ancestor of Boaz's clan living in Bethlehem. The point of comparison between Ruth and Tamar is neither their characters nor the manner in which they conceived (Tamar's was the result of incestuous deception) but the common levirate nature of their unions."

# Story of Elijah



## INTRODUCTION TO ELIJAH

At first glance, it is difficult to see the connection between Ruth and 1 and 2 Kings. The stories are nearly 300 years apart. One deals with fiery prophets and bloody battles, the other with farmers and the starting of families. But the deeds of Israel's kings, and the prophets who come to them, all spring out of the covenant which God makes with Ruth's great-grandson, King David. David, like his grandfather Obed, is a redeemer and answer to prayer, but the LORD has greater things in store than even them. In 2 Samuel 7 the LORD commits himself to the rule of David's household, and promises that

*"When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever."*

In the earlier chapters of 1 Kings, the beginnings of this blessing are seen in abundance. There is rest, bounty, peace and flourishing just as God had promised. But after Solomon's devastating collapse, as the kingdom falls apart, we realize that Solomon is not the one whom God promised to David. As 1 Kings progresses, our hopes for the covenant are challenged, and the massive failures of the kings of Israel and Judah lead the people further and further into idolatry.

The book of Kings is a long story on the tragic decline of Israel's monarchy, seen through the lens of the covenant which God laid out for his holy people in Deuteronomy. The book of Kings ultimately answers the question, "In light of God's covenants with his people, how did it all go so wrong? How will God's promises be fulfilled?" All of the necessary pieces are in place, yet we see one failure after another. By the time we get to the end of 1 Kings - where our series begins - Israel is at one of its lowest spiritual points ever. King Ahab, who rules the Northern Kingdom from Samaria, is a spineless wretch who despises God and his word, and is only concerned with his own power and comfort. As our story begins, the people of God seem hardly better off than during the time of the judges. It is into this situation that God commissions his prophets: men of God who speak the word of God. God in his mercy sends Elijah and Elisha to remind Israel that there is one God alone, who lives, speaks, and acts, and that even in the midst of the darkness, his purposes cannot be thwarted.

### A FEW THEMES IN THE ELIJAH CYCLE (1 KINGS 16 - 2 KINGS 2)

The power of God's word  
Warning and judgement  
Prophecy and false prophecy  
Idolatry and right worship  
God's sovereignty

### Structure of Kings

Solomon and the United Monarchy (1 Kings 1-11)  
Separation of the northern kingdom (1 Kings 12)  
Kings of Israel and Judah (1 Kings 13-16)  
The Omri Dynasty (1 Kings 17 - 2 Kings 11)  
Kings of Israel and Judah (2 Kings 12-16)  
Fall of the northern kingdom (2 Kings 17)  
Kingdom of Judah alone (2 Kings 18-25)

### Our Series

Study #5: 1 Kings 16:29-17:24 "Ahab is the worst"  
Study #6: 1 Kings 18 "The godly roast"  
Study #7: 1 Kings 19 "Elijah and the mountain"  
Study #8: 1 Kings 21 "God loves His children"  
Study #9: 1 Kings 22 "The end of Ahab"  
Study #10: 2 Kings 1 "There is a God who speaks in Israel"

Study #11: 2 Kings 2 “Passing the baton” \*queue chariots of fire music

### **A FEW NOTES ON THE PROPHETS**

Miracles seem to cluster when God’s kingdom is advancing in a significant way. The significance and meaning of the miracles in the Early Prophets is less clear than in other periods.

- The Exodus: God reveals his name, his covenant, and his redemption
- The Early Prophets (Samuel, Elijah and Elisha): God introduces kingship, and uses prophets to keep Israel’s kings in line
- The coming of Christ: God reveals himself in the flesh and fulfills his covenant promises
- The coming of the Spirit: God establishes his Church and sends them to continue Christ’s ministry

In context, the miracles in 1 & 2 Kings seem to point to these things:

- There is one true God, the LORD and all other gods are no gods. The LORD alone is worthy of praise, worship, fear, obedience and love.
- God reveals his will and ways by his word, which is clear, effective and powerful. Miracles take place “according to the word of the LORD.”
- God speaks his word through his true prophets, calling for covenant faithfulness and warning of consequences of unfaithfulness. Prophets trump kings.
- Salvation and life are through the word (water, babies, food).
- Judgement is by the word of the LORD (fire, drought, etc).
- God’s greater purposes. These miracles look back to Moses and also forward to Christ.
- Concern for the land as God’s place of rest and rule.
- Concern for the people of God and their worship of God alone
- The LORD’s universal rule. He works outside the land and outside God’s people as well (Just like in Ruth).



# Ruth // Elizah



## 1 KINGS 16:29-17:24

The beginning of our series on Elijah and Elisha starts midway through Israel's history of Kings. Up to this point there are two things worth noting about the kings of Israel:

1. They are, by and large, failures on every metric important to God,
2. The new king Ahab is the worst out of all of them (1 Kgs 16:30).

During this all-time low in Israel's leadership, God sends Elijah to be his prophet to a kingdom that is on the verge of abandoning him. The rebellion is so dire that God sends a three-year drought to sternly warn his people about the path they are on (Deut 11:13-17), and this drought sets in motion a war between two gods for the hearts of the people of Israel.



## **1 KINGS 16:29-17:24**

### STUDY 5

#### **ACT 1**

##### 1 Kings 16

29 In the thirty-eighth year of Asa king of Judah, Ahab the son of Omri began to reign over Israel, and Ahab the son of Omri reigned over Israel in Samaria twenty-two years. 30 And Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the LORD, more than all who were before him. 31 And as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, he took for his wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and went and served Baal and worshiped him. 32 He erected an altar for Baal in the house of Baal, which he built in Samaria. 33 And Ahab made an Asherah. Ahab did more to provoke the LORD, the God of Israel, to anger than all the kings of Israel who were before him. 34 In his days Hiel of Bethel built Jericho. He laid its foundation at the cost of Abiram, his firstborn, and set up its gates at the cost of his youngest son Segub, according to the word of the LORD, which he spoke by Joshua the son of Nun.

##### 1 Kings 17

1 Now Elijah the Tishbite, of Tishbe in Gilead, said to Ahab, "As the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, before whom I stand, there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word."

#### **ACT 2**

2 And the word of the LORD came to him: 3 "Depart from here and turn eastward and hide yourself by the brook Cherith, which is east of the Jordan. 4 You shall drink from the brook, and I have commanded the ravens to feed you there." 5 So he went and did according to the word of the LORD. He went and lived by the brook Cherith that is east of the Jordan. 6 And the ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning, and bread and meat in the evening, and he drank from the brook. 7 And after a while the brook dried up, because there was no rain in the land.

#### **ACT 3**

8 Then the word of the LORD came to him, 9 "Arise, go to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and dwell there. Behold, I have commanded a widow there to feed you." 10 So he arose and went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gate of the city, behold, a widow was there gathering sticks. And he called to her and said, "Bring me a little water in a vessel, that I may drink." 11 And as she was going to bring it, he called to her and said, "Bring me a morsel of bread in your hand." 12 And she said, "As the LORD your God lives, I have nothing baked, only a handful of flour in a jar and a little oil in a jug. And now I am gathering a couple of sticks that I may go in

and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it and die.” 13 And Elijah said to her, “Do not fear; go and do as you have said. But first make me a little cake of it and bring it to me, and afterward make something for yourself and your son. 14 For thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, ‘The jar of flour shall not be spent, and the jug of oil shall not be empty, until the day that the LORD sends rain upon the earth.’” 15 And she went and did as Elijah said. And she and he and her household ate for many days. 16 The jar of flour was not spent, neither did the jug of oil become empty, according to the word of the LORD that he spoke by Elijah.

#### **ACT 4**

17 After this the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, became ill. And his illness was so severe that there was no breath left in him. 18 And she said to Elijah, “What have you against me, O man of God? You have come to me to bring my sin to remembrance and to cause the death of my son!” 19 And he said to her, “Give me your son.” And he took him from her arms and carried him up into the upper chamber where he lodged, and laid him on his own bed. 20 And he cried to the LORD, “O LORD my God, have you brought calamity even upon the widow with whom I sojourn, by killing her son?” 21 Then he stretched himself upon the child three times and cried to the LORD, “O LORD my God, let this child’s life come into him again.” 22 And the LORD listened to the voice of Elijah. And the life of the child came into him again, and he revived. 23 And Elijah took the child and brought him down from the upper chamber into the house and delivered him to his mother. And Elijah said, “See, your son lives.” 24 And the woman said to Elijah, “Now I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the LORD in your mouth is truth.”



## STEP 1. WHAT DOES IT SAY?

### A Pray

### B Look Closely At

- Repetitions, Contrasts, Surprises
- Big Bible Words
- Commands
- Promises
- Characters
- Dialogue – who is talking to whom?
- Setting (timeline and place) – does it change?

### C Look Structurally

- What kind of writing is this? (eg. narrative, poetry, parable, teaching)
- How does the plot unfold? (Conflict? Climax? Resolution?)

#### NEED SOME HELP?

If you need some help with steps 1-2, check out the study notes on page 54.

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### D A few questions to consider

- Who are the major characters in this passage? How does this passage contrast Elijah and Ahab?
- How much description of Elijah is given? What does this say about the relative importance of the prophet and his mission?
- What are some notable features of Ahab's and Jezebel's reign in vv. 29-34 of chapter 16?

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## STUDY NOTES

### **16:32 “He erected an altar for Baal in the house of Baal, which he built in Samaria.”**

During the reign of Ahab and his son Ahaziah, worship of Baal became the official state religion of the Northern Kingdom. In ancient Semitic languages the word “Baal” means “Lord” and there were many different Baals worshiped throughout the region, with the practice most deeply rooted in Canaan. The Baal specifically worshiped in the Northern Kingdom at Samaria was brought by Queen Jezebel and was therefore a Phoenecian Baal of fertility, rain and storms. Thus God’s command of an extended drought completely undermined that empty and powerless Baal.

### **16:33 “...Ahab did more to provoke the LORD, the God of Israel...”**

On the surface, Ahab was a fairly successful king. He gained new trade routes, forged alliances, and ruled for over 20 years in relative peace. But, if we assess his rule against the laws set out by God in Deuteronomy and remember God’s call for faithful obedience from his kings, we begin to get a picture of how the actions of Ahab run directly counter to what God wants:

Deut 16:21-22 “Do not set up any wooden Asherah pole beside the altar you build to the LORD your God, and do not erect a sacred stone, for these the LORD your God Hates.”

Deut 17:18-20 “When he takes the throne of his kingdom, he is to write for himself on a scroll a copy of this law, taken from that of the Levitical priests. It is to be with him, and he is to read it all the days of his life so that he may learn to revere the LORD his God and follow carefully all the words of this law and these decrees and not consider himself better than his fellow Israelites and turn from the law to the right or to the left.”

### **7:1 “Now Elijah the Tishbite, of Tishbe in Gilead...”**

What and who are the prophets? It is a role that is very often referred to within the Bible but it is sometimes rather tricky to get a complete picture of who they were. The question is complicated by those who were self-proclaimed (false) prophets and also by our limited contemporary understanding of the word “prophecy.” God’s prophets are neither self-selected nor fortune tellers. Rather, they are the spiritual watchdogs for God’s word amongst his people. Whether he be a farmer, a soldier or a king, a prophet is firstly, and most importantly, chosen by God to be his spokesperson to the people. And his delivering of the word of the LORD can look very different depending on what message the people need to hear at any given time. Often their messages are ones of warning, serving as reminders to God’s people of the covenants God has made with them: to promise and provide blessing should they follow him; to curse and pronounce judgement should they reject him. That Elijah leaves the land after delivering his message to Ahab suggests that God has chosen not to speak in Samaria for a time as a form of judgement on the Northern Kingdom..

### **17:3 “Depart from here and turn eastward and hide yourself by the brook...”**

God has provided food for his people in the wilderness on other occasions but this instance is much stranger than usual. After receiving the word of the LORD and speaking with King Ahab, Elijah is told to retreat to the wilderness and seek provision from scavenger birds and, eventually, the destitute widow. Ravens and crows were unclean under Levitical law, the brook is short-lived, and the foreign widow (probably a Phoenecian) would have held the poorest status possible at the time. God’s direction to Elijah in this section is peculiar, surprising and yet so gloriously like him. Who else would delight in using unclean birds and hopeless foreign women to sustain his servant?

### **7:9 “Arise, go to Zarephath...”**

This is where Elijah finds the widow who will help him. Lying approximately 80 miles north of Samaria (the Northern Kingdom of Israel) Zarephath is ironically located squarely in the territory of Jezebel’s father, Ethbaal. As commentator Dale Ralph Davies puts it “Elijah is headed for Baalsville in Gentileland”. It is in this location that a lifelong servant of Baal will not only provide for the LORD’s prophet but will also trust in his word, thereby joining the ranks of those outside of God’s covenant who still receive his extravagant grace.

**7:22 “And the LORD listened to the voice of Elijah...”**

Miracles that deal with return to life are rare especially within the Old Testament. In fact the only other person to perform a similar miracle in the Old Testament is Elijah’s successor Elisha. These miracles in the Book of Kings are used to testify to the truthful and powerful nature of the LORD and to confirm Elijah and Elisha as his prophets. When Jesus performs similar miracles in the Gospels they speak to his authority and power as well.

# Ruth // Elijah



## 1 KINGS 18

Last week we met Elijah, a scruffy prophet from Tishbe, whom the LORD chooses to use as his prophet. Elijah's ministry is to pronounce judgement for sin, in the hope of bringing God's people to repentance in the midst of the worst monarchy they have ever had. In this chapter, after years of drought, Elijah confronts Ahab and the people with a dramatic showdown on Mount Carmel. There he sets a choice before the people: if the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal is, follow him. In this chapter we get a glimpse of how dehumanizing and useless idolatry is but, more importantly, we see God's grace as he uses the judgement which began in 1 Kings 17 to bring his people back to him.





## 1 KINGS 18

### STUDY 5

#### ACT 1

1 After many days the word of the LORD came to Elijah, in the third year, saying, “Go, show yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain upon the earth.” 2 So Elijah went to show himself to Ahab. Now the famine was severe in Samaria. 3 And Ahab called Obadiah, who was over the household. (Now Obadiah feared the LORD greatly, 4 and when Jezebel cut off the prophets of the LORD, Obadiah took a hundred prophets and hid them by fifties in a cave and fed them with bread and water.) 5 And Ahab said to Obadiah, “Go through the land to all the springs of water and to all the valleys. Perhaps we may find grass and save the horses and mules alive, and not lose some of the animals.” 6 So they divided the land between them to pass through it. Ahab went in one direction by himself, and Obadiah went in another direction by himself.

#### ACT 2

7 And as Obadiah was on the way, behold, Elijah met him. And Obadiah recognized him and fell on his face and said, “Is it you, my lord Elijah?” 8 And he answered him, “It is I. Go, tell your lord, ‘Behold, Elijah is here.’” 9 And he said, “How have I sinned, that you would give your servant into the hand of Ahab, to kill me? 10 As the LORD your God lives, there is no nation or kingdom where my lord has not sent to seek you. And when they would say, ‘He is not here,’ he would take an oath of the kingdom or nation, that they had not found you. 11 And now you say, ‘Go, tell your lord, “Behold, Elijah is here.”’ 12 And as soon as I have gone from you, the Spirit of the LORD will carry you I know not where. And so, when I come and tell Ahab and he cannot find you, he will kill me, although I your servant have feared the LORD from my youth. 13 Has it not been told my lord what I did when Jezebel killed the prophets of the LORD, how I hid a hundred men of the LORD’s prophets by fifties in a cave and fed them with bread and water? 14 And now you say, ‘Go, tell your lord, “Behold, Elijah is here”’; and he will kill me.” 15 And Elijah said, “As the LORD of hosts lives, before whom I stand, I will surely show myself to him today.”

#### ACT 3

16 So Obadiah went to meet Ahab, and told him. And Ahab went to meet Elijah. 17 When Ahab saw Elijah, Ahab said to him, “Is it you, you troubler of Israel?” 18 And he answered, “I have not troubled Israel, but you have, and your father’s house, because you have abandoned the commandments of the LORD and followed the Baals. 19 Now therefore send and gather all Israel to me at Mount Carmel, and the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel’s table.” 20 So Ahab sent to all the people of Israel and gathered the prophets together at Mount Carmel.

#### ACT 4

21 And Elijah came near to all the people and said, “How long will you go limping between two different opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him.” And the people did not answer him a word.

22 Then Elijah said to the people, "I, even I only, am left a prophet of the LORD, but Baal's prophets are 450 men. 23 Let two bulls be given to us, and let them choose one bull for themselves and cut it in pieces and lay it on the wood, but put no fire to it. And I will prepare the other bull and lay it on the wood and put no fire to it. 24 And you call upon the name of your god, and I will call upon the name of the LORD, and the God who answers by fire, he is God." And all the people answered, "It is well spoken." 25 Then Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, "Choose for yourselves one bull and prepare it first, for you are many, and call upon the name of your god, but put no fire to it." 26 And they took the bull that was given them, and they prepared it and called upon the name of Baal from morning until noon, saying, "O Baal, answer us!" But there was no voice, and no one answered. And they limped around the altar that they had made. 27 And at noon Elijah mocked them, saying, "Cry aloud, for he is a god. Either he is musing, or he is relieving himself, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and must be awakened." 28 And they cried aloud and cut themselves after their custom with swords and lances, until the blood gushed out upon them. 29 And as midday passed, they raved on until the time of the offering of the oblation, but there was no voice. No one answered; no one paid attention.

### **ACT 5**

30 Then Elijah said to all the people, "Come near to me." And all the people came near to him. And he repaired the altar of the LORD that had been thrown down. 31 Elijah took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, to whom the word of the LORD came, saying, "Israel shall be your name," 32 and with the stones he built an altar in the name of the LORD. And he made a trench about the altar, as great as would contain two seahs of seed. 33 And he put the wood in order and cut the bull in pieces and laid it on the wood. And he said, "Fill four jars with water and pour it on the burnt offering and on the wood." 34 And he said, "Do it a second time." And they did it a second time. And he said, "Do it a third time." And they did it a third time. 35 And the water ran around the altar and filled the trench also with water. 36 And at the time of the offering of the oblation, Elijah the prophet came near and said, "O LORD, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that you are God in Israel, and that I am your servant, and that I have done all these things at your word. 37 Answer me, O LORD, answer me, that this people may know that you, O LORD, are God, and that you have turned their hearts back." 38 Then the fire of the LORD fell and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench.

### **ACT 6**

39 And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces and said, "The LORD, he is God; the LORD, he is God." 40 And Elijah said to them, "Seize the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape." And they seized them. And Elijah brought them down to the brook Kishon and slaughtered them there.

### **ACT 7**

41 And Elijah said to Ahab, "Go up, eat and drink, for there is a sound of the rushing of rain." 42 So Ahab went up to eat and to drink. And Elijah went up to the top of Mount Carmel. And he bowed himself down on the earth and put his face between his knees. 43 And he said to his servant, "Go up now, look toward the sea." And he went up and looked and said, "There is nothing." And he said, "Go again," seven times. 44 And at the seventh time he said, "Behold, a little cloud like a man's hand is rising from the sea." And he said, "Go up, say to Ahab, 'Prepare your chariot and go down, lest the rain stop you.'" 45 And in a little while the heavens grew black with clouds and wind, and there was a great rain. And Ahab rode and went to Jezreel. 46 And the hand of the LORD was on Elijah, and he gathered up his garment and ran before Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel.

## STEP 1. WHAT DOES IT SAY?

### A Pray

### B Look Closely At

- Repetitions, Contrasts, Surprises
- Big Bible Words
- Commands
- Promises
- Characters
- Dialogue – who is talking to whom?
- Setting (timeline and place) – does it change?

### C Look Structurally

- What kind of writing is this? (eg. narrative, poetry, parable, teaching)
- How does the plot unfold? (Conflict? Climax? Resolution?)

#### NEED SOME HELP?

If you need some help with steps 1-2, check out the study notes on page 64.

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### D A few questions to consider

- How desperate is the famine by this point? What details in the story show this?
- Ahab is the king of Israel. What is his role in this episode? How does he respond to the drought and the deliverance from drought?
- What is the goal of Elijah's prayer? How is it different from the prayers of the prophets of Baal?
- Compare and contrast the portrayals of the LORD and of Baal. What is the story emphasizing?

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## STUDY NOTES

### 18:3 “who was over the household.”

Obadiah is effectively Ahab’s right hand man, holding a significant amount of power. This is probably why he was in a position to hide “a hundred prophets” (v.4), and went out with Ahab to survey the kingdom. Though the king has given himself over to false gods, the LORD’s servants are still at work in the land. Archaeologists have found more than two thousand caves in the area of Mount Carmel.

### 18:2 “the famine was severe in Samaria.”

At this point in Israel’s history, the kingdom is divided between the north (Israel, ruled from Samaria), and the south (Judah, ruled from Jerusalem). This division arose because of Solomon’s persistent sin (1 Kings 11:9-13) and it comes to pass just after his death in 1 Kings 12. If the famine is severe even in the capital city of Samaria then the situation has gotten quite bad.

### 18:4 “when Jezebel cut off the prophets of the LORD”

King Ahab’s wife, Jezebel, was a Sidonian (Phoenician) and so worshiped the storm and fertility god Baal. Her maneuver to remove the LORD’s prophets is both politically and spiritually motivated because, in ancient Mesopotamia, the validity of a monarch was always built upon a particular religious system. She is trying to exterminate the prophets of the LORD and all who worship him in order to build a kingdom in her own image.

18:5 “perhaps we may find grass and save the horses...” Horses during this time would have been used primarily for waging war, so what Ahab is really concerned about in the midst of the famine is maintaining his military strength. A record from the Assyrian king Shalmaneser III claims that Ahab fought him with 2000 chariots, though that is likely an exaggeration.

### 18:15 “as the LORD of Hosts lives...”

This is an interesting title for the LORD, which emphasizes his command of heavenly armies, in contrast to Baal who is sometimes called “Baal of the Heavens.” It is a significant moment in Elijah’s prophetic ministry and he will only use the title once more, in 19:10-14. God is also called “the LORD of Hosts” by Elisha in 2 Kings 3:14.

### 18:19 “Gather all Israel to me at Mount Carmel”

Mount Carmel was on the boundary between Israel and Phoenicia. High places often functioned as sites of worship. Because the Israelites could no longer worship in the temple in Jerusalem, the rebuilding of the LORD’s altar here on the mountain is appropriate (v.30). When this altar was first built is never revealed in the Old Testament and it isn’t one of the sites mentioned in 1 Samuel 7:15-17.

### 18:23 “Let two bulls be given to us...”

The sacrifices offered here should be understood as petitions to rescue Israel from drought and famine. The ritual asks that the true God accept the sacrifice by consuming it with fire. By accepting the sacrifice, there is also the implicit acceptance of the prayer to bring rain and an end to the drought. Whichever god burns up the sacrifice will bring the deliverance of rain.

### 18:24 “the god who answers by fire, he is God.”

In the ancient Near East there were numerous religions and most of them had multiple gods. Typically in these religions there were a few central gods who had the most power and thus got the most attention. Baal, whose name in Semitic languages simply means “master,” was one of these central gods. Phoenicia, which was becoming a significant power by this time, had Baal worship and so, when Jezebel marries Ahab, she brings her idolatry with her. In 1 Kings 17 Baal’s impotence was emphasized by his inability as a storm god to end the drought. Here his inability to strike the sacrifice with lightning in order to burn it up brings further shame.

### 18:27-28 “Either he is musing...”

Elijah’s mockery plays on established customs of Baal-worship where the god would need to be roused from sleep by his worshippers. They cut themselves as a means of showing utter devotion. This is in stark contrast to the God of the Bible (e.g. Psa 121:4)



**18:29 “No one answered. No one paid attention.”**

The theme of answering is central to this passage. When Ahab accuses Elijah (v.17), Elijah answers with a stern declaration of truth. In contrast, when Elijah reprimands the people (and Ahab) they are unable to give an answer (v.21). The test which Elijah proposes centres on which god will “answer with fire” (v.24), and when Elijah prays before the people he entreats the LORD to give an answer (v.37), which he does unambiguously in v.38. The Lord God of Israel is the God who has spoken and continues to speak clearly to his people. The climax of the entire episode comes with Elijah’s final answer to prayer, in the sending of rain (vv.42-45), at which point we as readers might wonder “what will be Ahab’s answer?”

# Ruth // Elijah



## 1 KINGS 19

In Chapter 18, Elijah acted with great boldness, courage, and trust in God, rightly earning his status as a prophetic hero unequalled in the history of Israel. The end of that chapter saw Elijah departing in triumph after mediating a spectacular display of God's power—a display that seemed to result in a stunning defeat of idolatry. In this chapter, we see a different side of Elijah—Elijah in crisis. The same Elijah who alone faced down the 450 prophets of Baal without flinching now wilts and runs away in fear at the rantings of one angry woman.



## 1 KINGS 19

### STUDY 7

#### ACT 1

1 Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. 2 Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, “So may the gods do to me and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by this time tomorrow.”

#### ACT 2

3 Then he was afraid, and he arose and ran for his life and came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there. 4 But he himself went a day’s journey into the wilderness and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he asked that he might die, saying, “It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers.” 5 And he lay down and slept under a broom tree. And behold, an angel touched him and said to him, “Arise and eat.” 6 And he looked, and behold, there was at his head a cake baked on hot stones and a jar of water. And he ate and drank and lay down again. 7 And the angel of the LORD came again a second time and touched him and said, “Arise and eat, for the journey is too great for you.” 8 And he arose and ate and drank, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mount of God.

#### ACT 3

9 There he came to a cave and lodged in it. And behold, the word of the LORD came to him, and he said to him, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” 10 He said, “I have been very jealous for the LORD, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away.” 11 And he said, “Go out and stand on the mount before the LORD.” And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind tore the mountains and broke in pieces the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. 12 And after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire the sound of a low whisper. 13 And when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. And behold, there came a voice to him and said, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” 14 He said, “I have been very jealous for the LORD, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away.” 15 And the LORD said to him, “Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus. And when you arrive, you shall anoint Hazael to be king over Syria. 16 And Jehu the son of Nimshi you shall anoint to be king over Israel, and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah you shall anoint to be prophet in your place. 17 And the one who escapes from the sword of Hazael shall Jehu put to death, and the one who escapes from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha put to death. 18 Yet I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him.”

**ACT 4**

19 So he departed from there and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, who was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen in front of him, and he was with the twelfth. Elijah passed by him and cast his cloak upon him. 20 And he left the oxen and ran after Elijah and said, "Let me kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow you." And he said to him, "Go back again, for what have I done to you?" 21 And he returned from following him and took the yoke of oxen and sacrificed them and boiled their flesh with the yokes of the oxen and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he arose and went after Elijah and assisted him.

## STEP 1. WHAT DOES IT SAY?

### A Pray

### B Look Closely At

- Repetitions, Contrasts, Surprises
- Big Bible Words
- Commands
- Promises
- Characters
- Dialogue – who is talking to whom?
- Setting (timeline and place) – does it change?

### C Look Structurally

- What kind of writing is this? (eg. narrative, poetry, parable, teaching)
- How does the plot unfold? (Conflict? Climax? Resolution?)

#### NEED SOME HELP?

If you need some help with steps 1-2, check out the study notes on page 74.

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### D A few questions to consider

- What significant repetitions do you notice?
- What was Elijah's destination when he ran from Jezreel? How did God respond to Elijah's fear?
- In what ways was Elijah's statement in 19:10 and 19:14 misleading or untrue?
- Where in this chapter do we find Elijah calling on the LORD or seeking his direction?

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## STUDY NOTES

### 19:2 “Then Jezebel sent a messenger...”

The Hebrew word *mal'akh*, translated “messenger” in 19:2, is the same word translated “angel” in 19:5 & 7. God countered Jezebel’s messenger with his own messenger, a point that is lost in our English translations.

### 19:3 “he arose and ran for his life and came to Beersheba.”

The distance from Jezreel to Beersheba (the southernmost town in Judah) is approximately 100 miles and the distance from Beersheba to Mount Horeb is approximately 260 miles (Horeb is another name for Sinai).

### 19:15-16 “And when you arrive you shall anoint...”

In 19:15-16 Elijah is commanded by God to anoint Hazael to be king of Syria and Jehu to be king of Israel, commissions which clearly envisaged the use of violence. Elijah was also commanded to anoint Elisha to be prophet in Elijah’s place. The problem is that there is nothing anywhere in Scripture to indicate that Elijah ever even met with Hazael or Jehu. In fact it was Elisha, not Elijah, who arranged for the anointing of Jehu (2 Kings 9:1-10). And it was Elisha, not Elijah, who arranged for Hazael’s murder of Ben Hadad (2 Kings 8:7-15). The casual reader is left with the impression that Elijah may not have been entirely on board with God’s new commission for him.

## ELIJAH AND MOSES

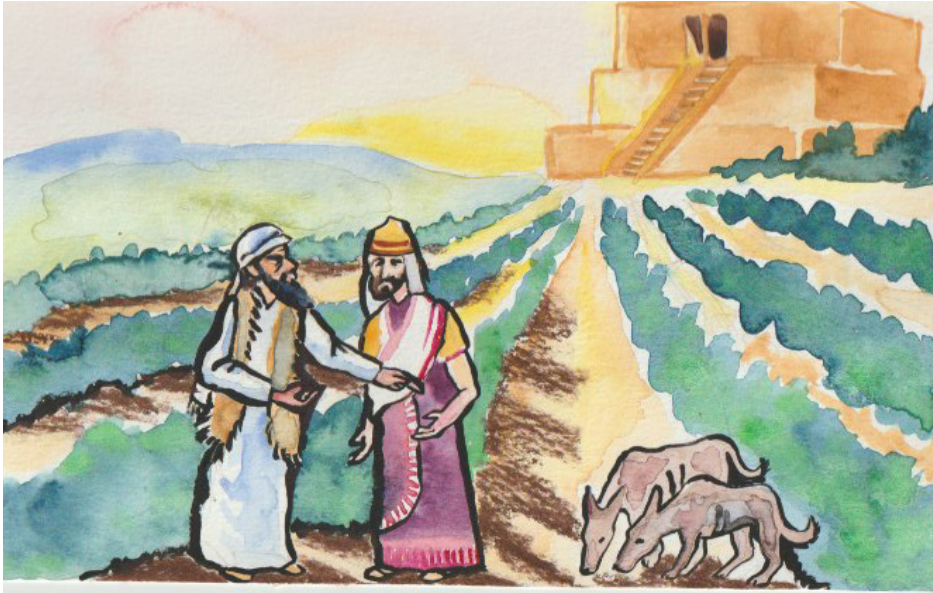
There are some striking similarities between Elijah and Moses: both fled into the wilderness fearing for their lives (1 Kgs 19:4; Exod 2:15); in the wilderness, both were fed bread and meat (1 Kgs 17:6; Exod 16:8, 12); Elijah gathered all Israel to Mt. Carmel (1 Kgs 18:19) and Moses gathered all Israel to Mt. Sinai (Exod 19:17); Elijah built an altar with twelve stones (1 Kgs 18:30-31) and Moses constructed an altar flanked by twelve pillars (Exod 24:4); Elijah performed a sacrifice, the altar was consumed by fire, and the people bowed (1 Kgs 18:38) and Moses offered a sacrifice after consecrating his altar, the fire consumed the offering, and the people bowed (Lev 9:24); after killing the prophets of Baal Elijah climbed Mt. Carmel to pray (1 Kgs 18:42) and after killing the idolaters Moses climbed Mt. Sinai to pray (Exod 32:30); both went without food for forty days and forty nights (1 Kgs 19:8; Deut 9:9); Elijah was re-commissioned at Horeb (1 Kgs 19:15-16) and Moses was commissioned at Sinai (Exod 3); both experienced a theophany at Horeb/Sinai (1 Kgs 19:11-12; Exod 19:16-20); Elijah was in a cave on Horeb when the Lord “passed by” (1 Kgs 19:9-12) and Moses was hidden in the cleft of a rock on Sinai when the Lord “passed by” (Exod 33:18-23); and both parted the waters of the Jordan (2 Kgs 2:8; Exod 14:16). There are also some striking differences ...

# Ruth // Elizah



## 1 KINGS 21

In this passage we get a bleak picture of how far the leadership of Israel has truly fallen. Not only is King Ahab far from a dispenser of justice or a wise follower of God's word but here, with the help of his wife Jezebel, he is an active source of injustice, corruption, and self-serving murder within God's kingdom. And so our question, as we read this passage, is: If the life of Naboth does not matter to the king and queen of his country, who shall deal out justice for him? And, finally we may ask, what shall be done with this petulant and wretched royalty?



## 1 KINGS 21

### STUDY 8

#### ACT 1

Now Naboth the Jezreelite had a vineyard in Jezreel, beside the palace of Ahab king of Samaria. 2 And after this Ahab said to Naboth, “Give me your vineyard, that I may have it for a vegetable garden, because it is near my house, and I will give you a better vineyard for it; or, if it seems good to you, I will give you its value in money.” 3 But Naboth said to Ahab, “The LORD forbid that I should give you the inheritance of my fathers.” 4 And Ahab went into his house vexed and sullen because of what Naboth the Jezreelite had said to him, for he had said, “I will not give you the inheritance of my fathers.” And he lay down on his bed and turned away his face and would eat no food.

#### ACT 2

5 But Jezebel his wife came to him and said to him, “Why is your spirit so vexed that you eat no food?” 6 And he said to her, “Because I spoke to Naboth the Jezreelite and said to him, ‘Give me your vineyard for money, or else, if it pleases you, I will give you another vineyard for it.’ And he answered, ‘I will not give you my vineyard.’” 7 And Jezebel his wife said to him, “Do you now govern Israel? Arise and eat bread and let your heart be cheerful; I will give you the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite.” 8 So she wrote letters in Ahab’s name and sealed them with his seal, and she sent the letters to the elders and the leaders who lived with Naboth in his city. 9 And she wrote in the letters, “Proclaim a fast, and set Naboth at the head of the people. 10 And set two worthless men opposite him, and let them bring a charge against him, saying, ‘You have cursed God and the king.’ Then take him out and stone him to death.” 11 And the men of his city, the elders and the leaders who lived in his city, did as Jezebel had sent word to them. As it was written in the letters that she had sent to them, 12 they proclaimed a fast and set Naboth at the head of the people. 13 And the two worthless men came in and sat opposite him. And the worthless men brought a charge against Naboth in the presence of the people, saying, “Naboth cursed God and the king.” So they took him outside the city and stoned him to death with stones. 14 Then they sent to Jezebel, saying, “Naboth has been stoned; he is dead.” 15 As soon as Jezebel heard that Naboth had been stoned and was dead, Jezebel said to Ahab, “Arise, take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, which he refused to give you for money, for Naboth is not alive, but dead.” 16 And as soon as Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, Ahab arose to go down to the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, to take possession of it.

#### ACT 3

17 Then the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, 18 “Arise, go down to meet Ahab king of Israel, who is in Samaria; behold, he is in the vineyard of Naboth, where he has gone to take possession. 19 And you shall say to him, ‘Thus says the LORD, “Have you killed and also taken possession?”’ And you shall say to him, ‘Thus says the LORD: “In the place where dogs licked up the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick your own

blood.” 20 Ahab said to Elijah, “Have you found me, O my enemy?” He answered, “I have found you, because you have sold yourself to do what is evil in the sight of the LORD. 21 Behold, I will bring disaster upon you. I will utterly burn you up, and will cut off from Ahab every male, bond or free, in Israel. 22 And I will make your house like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and like the house of Baasha the son of Ahijah, for the anger to which you have provoked me, and because you have made Israel to sin. 23 And of Jezebel the LORD also said, ‘The dogs shall eat Jezebel within the walls of Jezreel.’ 24 Anyone belonging to Ahab who dies in the city the dogs shall eat, and anyone of his who dies in the open country the birds of the heavens shall eat.”<sup>25</sup>(There was none who sold himself to do what was evil in the sight of the LORD like Ahab, whom Jezebel his wife incited. 26 He acted very abominably in going after idols, as the Amorites had done, whom the LORD cast out before the people of Israel.) 27 And when Ahab heard those words, he tore his clothes and put sackcloth on his flesh and fasted and lay in sackcloth and went about dejectedly. 28 And the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, 29 “Have you seen how Ahab has humbled himself before me? Because he has humbled himself before me, I will not bring the disaster in his days; but in his son’s days I will bring the disaster upon his house.”

## STEP 1. WHAT DOES IT SAY?

### A Pray

### B Look Closely At

- Repetitions, Contrasts, Surprises
- Big Bible Words
- Commands
- Promises
- Characters
- Dialogue – who is talking to whom?
- Setting (timeline and place) – does it change?

### C Look Structurally

- What kind of writing is this? (eg. narrative, poetry, parable, teaching)
- How does the plot unfold? (Conflict? Climax? Resolution?)

#### NEED SOME HELP?

If you need some help with steps 1-2, check out the study notes on page 83.

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### D A few questions to consider

- What more do we learn about the character of Ahab? At this stage in 1 Kings, how is he treating Elijah (v.20)?
- What is Naboth's reason for rejecting Ahab's offer? (Refer to the Study Notes for help.)
- What judgement does the LORD pronounce through Elijah to Ahab and Jezebel?

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## STUDY NOTES

### **“21:3 But Naboth said to Ahab, “The LORD forbid...”**

Naboth rightfully believes the land belongs to the LORD, in contrast to Ahab and other Canaanite kings who thought all land was theirs to be used as they wished. If he were to sell it to Ahab Naboth would effectively be cutting off his descendants from their rightful inheritance from God. (Lev 25:23; Num 27:1-11, 36:1-12). Though he may not like Naboth's reason for refusing his proposal, Ahab seems aware enough that this reason is truly legitimate: hence his sulking.

### **21:10 “...and let them bring a charge against him...”**

The cunning queen sets up a kangaroo court in order to damn Naboth to death. Through manipulation and misapplication of some Old Testament laws (Exod 22:28, Lev 24:15-16) she manages to twist God's word for her own evil usage. The implication here is that, not only has the queen read some of God's Law but she is spiteful enough to use it against God's own people. This is a tactic used commonly by Satan throughout history.

### **21:15 “...for Naboth is not alive...”**

The destruction of Naboth at the hands of Jezebel is carried out to the fullest possible extent: 2 Kings 9:26 reveals that Naboth's sons were also killed for the sake of the king's vegetable garden.

### **21:22 “And I will make your house like the house of Jeroboam...”**

Ahab's and Jezebel's sin is so grievous as to invite comparison with the very worst rulers before them. Israel had not had a pair of kings so bad until now. Jeroboam was the king who split Israel apart into two kingdoms and made for himself other gods of metal and stone (1 Kgs 14:7-11). His rule was so bad that God sentenced his whole family line to be cut off. The second evil king, Baasha who succeeded Jeroboam, was the man who murdered Jeroboam and his entire family (1 Kgs 15:27-30). Perhaps surprising to us, Ahab's and Jezebel's actions of murdering innocents is condemned by God more harshly than the sins of these others, so highly does God treasure his own people.

### **21:24 “Anyone belonging to Ahab who dies in the city the dogs shall eat, and anyone of his who dies in the open country the birds of the heavens shall eat.”**

This judgement passed from Elijah to the king and his family is one involving great shame. The lack of a proper burial suggests a status reserved for only the worst criminals. Then there is the added shame of the animals involved: by ancient Israel's standards, dogs and carrion birds were some of the most unclean animals possible. The judgement against Ahab and his line is one of complete and utter disgrace, a terrible fate for anyone living in a culture driven by honor and shame.



# Ruth // Elizah



## 1 KINGS 22:1-40

We have been following the rebellious life of King Ahab for a while now. Last week we saw in particular how little Ahab cared for the people which God had put under his care. Naboth and his vineyard, as representatives of Israel, are mercilessly cut down for the sake of the king's ego, resulting in God's just judgement. Though Ahab repents of his sin, the pattern of his behaviour remains largely unchanged as we witness in our passage today. Here, as we reach the end of Ahab's life, we see the pernicious effects of sin and the ultimate consequences of rejecting the LORD. Yet in spite of all the darkness, God's mercy and sovereignty shine through as Israel waits for a day when she will once again have a good shepherd.



## 1 KINGS 22:1-40

### STUDY 9

#### ACT 1

For three years Syria and Israel continued without war. 2 But in the third year Jehoshaphat the king of Judah came down to the king of Israel. 3 And the king of Israel said to his servants, “Do you know that Ramoth-gilead belongs to us, and we keep quiet and do not take it out of the hand of the king of Syria?” 4 And he said to Jehoshaphat, “Will you go with me to battle at Ramoth-gilead?” And Jehoshaphat said to the king of Israel, “I am as you are, my people as your people, my horses as your horses.”

#### ACT 2

5 And Jehoshaphat said to the king of Israel, “Inquire first for the word of the LORD.” 6 Then the king of Israel gathered the prophets together, about four hundred men, and said to them, “Shall I go to battle against Ramoth-gilead, or shall I refrain?” And they said, “Go up, for the Lord will give it into the hand of the king.” 7 But Jehoshaphat said, “Is there not here another prophet of the LORD of whom we may inquire?” 8 And the king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, “There is yet one man by whom we may inquire of the LORD, Micaiah the son of Imlah, but I hate him, for he never prophesies good concerning me, but evil.” And Jehoshaphat said, “Let not the king say so.” 9 Then the king of Israel summoned an officer and said, “Bring quickly Micaiah the son of Imlah.” 10 Now the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat the king of Judah were sitting on their thrones, arrayed in their robes, at the threshing floor at the entrance of the gate of Samaria, and all the prophets were prophesying before them. 11 And Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah made for himself horns of iron and said, “Thus says the LORD, ‘With these you shall push the Syrians until they are destroyed.’” 12 And all the prophets prophesied so and said, “Go up to Ramoth-gilead and triumph; the LORD will give it into the hand of the king.”

#### ACT 3

13 And the messenger who went to summon Micaiah said to him, “Behold, the words of the prophets with one accord are favorable to the king. Let your word be like the word of one of them, and speak favorably.” 14 But Micaiah said, “As the LORD lives, what the LORD says to me, that I will speak.” 15 And when he had come to the king, the king said to him, “Micaiah, shall we go to Ramoth-gilead to battle, or shall we refrain?” And he answered him, “Go up and triumph; the LORD will give it into the hand of the king.” 16 But the king said to him, “How many times shall I make you swear that you speak to me nothing but the truth in the name of the LORD?” 17 And he said, “I saw all Israel scattered on the mountains, as sheep that have no shepherd. And the LORD said, ‘These have no master; let each return to his home in peace.’” 18 And the king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, “Did I not tell you that he would not prophesy good concerning me, but evil?” 19 And Micaiah said, “Therefore hear the word of the LORD: I saw the LORD sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing beside him on his right hand and on his left; 20 and the LORD said, ‘Who will entice Ahab, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead?’ And one said one thing, and another said another. 21 Then a spirit came forward and stood before the LORD, saying, ‘I will entice him.’ 22 And the LORD said to him, ‘By what means?’”

And he said, 'I will go out, and will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.' And he said, 'You are to entice him, and you shall succeed; go out and do so.' 23 Now therefore behold, the LORD has put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these your prophets; the LORD has declared disaster for you." 24 Then Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah came near and struck Micaiah on the cheek and said, "How did the Spirit of the LORD go from me to speak to you?" 25 And Micaiah said, "Behold, you shall see on that day when you go into an inner chamber to hide yourself." 26 And the king of Israel said, "Seize Micaiah, and take him back to Amon the governor of the city and to Joash the king's son, 27 and say, 'Thus says the king, "Put this fellow in prison and feed him meager rations of bread and water, until I come in peace.'"" 28 And Micaiah said, "If you return in peace, the LORD has not spoken by me." And he said, "Hear, all you peoples!"

#### **ACT 4**

29 So the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat the king of Judah went up to Ramoth-gilead. 30 And the king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, "I will disguise myself and go into battle, but you wear your robes." And the king of Israel disguised himself and went into battle. 31 Now the king of Syria had commanded the thirty-two captains of his chariots, "Fight with neither small nor great, but only with the king of Israel." 32 And when the captains of the chariots saw Jehoshaphat, they said, "It is surely the king of Israel." So they turned to fight against him. And Jehoshaphat cried out. 33 And when the captains of the chariots saw that it was not the king of Israel, they turned back from pursuing him. 34 But a certain man drew his bow at random<sup>1</sup> and struck the king of Israel between the scale armor and the breastplate. Therefore he said to the driver of his chariot, "Turn around and carry me out of the battle, for I am wounded." 35 And the battle continued that day, and the king was propped up in his chariot facing the Syrians, until at evening he died. And the blood of the wound flowed into the bottom of the chariot. 36 And about sunset a cry went through the army, "Every man to his city, and every man to his country!"

#### **ACT 5**

37 So the king died, and was brought to Samaria. And they buried the king in Samaria. 38 And they washed the chariot by the pool of Samaria, and the dogs licked up his blood, and the prostitutes washed themselves in it, according to the word of the LORD that he had spoken. 39 Now the rest of the acts of Ahab and all that he did, and the ivory house that he built and all the cities that he built, are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel? 40 So Ahab slept with his fathers, and Ahaziah his son reigned in his place.

## STEP 1. WHAT DOES IT SAY?

### A Pray

### B Look Closely At

- Repetitions, Contrasts, Surprises
- Big Bible Words
- Commands
- Promises
- Characters
- Dialogue – who is talking to whom?
- Setting (timeline and place) – does it change?

### C Look Structurally

- What kind of writing is this? (eg. narrative, poetry, parable, teaching)
- How does the plot unfold? (Conflict? Climax? Resolution?)

#### NEED SOME HELP?

If you need some help with steps 1-2, check out the study notes on page 92.

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### D A few questions to consider

- What do you think is the tone of Micaiah's voice in v.15? How does that help us understand the king's reaction in v.16?
- Compare and contrast the two kings here.
- How would you summarize each section in this chapter? How does this help you understand the flow of the story?

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## STUDY NOTES

### **22:2 “In the third year, Jehoshaphat...”**

Jehoshaphat’s name means “the LORD is judge,” and it is appropriate that he enters the story as a witness to God’s inevitable judgement of Ahab’s idolatry. The narrator uses his name to great effect, mentioning it thirteen times in our passage

### **22:3 “Ramoth-gilead belongs to us...”**

This is true. Back in 20:34 Ben-hadad promised to restore Ramoth-gilead to Ahab, along with some other cities. It lay east of the Jordan and was a significant defensive position against attacks from the north. It also lay along a trade route, which would have brought more money into the kingdom.

### **22:4 “I am as you are, my people as your people...”**

Ahab was a solid military man and is mentioned in some inscriptions from kings of surrounding kingdoms. Here Jehoshaphat is playing second fiddle to Ahab by committing his troops and the alliance hints at the possibility of a reunified Israel. Tellingly, it is only Jehoshaphat who seeks the LORD’s will in all of this.

### **22:6 “...about four hundred men...”**

This is a suspiciously large number of prophets and reminds us of the 450 prophets of Baal in 18:22. Though the LORD’s victory on Mount Carmel has had some consequences (These are at least not prophets of Baal.) Ahab still has no interest in listening to the word of the LORD. The fact that Jehoshaphat asks for another prophet, in spite of the prophecy of the 450 prophets, is a diplomatic rejection of what these men have said. The messenger’s admonition to Micaiah in v.13 is another good sign that these prophets are false prophets, simply telling the king what he wants to hear.

### **22:8 “Micaiah the son of Imlah”**

Micaiah’s name means “who is like the LORD?” Like some of the other minor prophets in the book of Kings, this incident in chapter twenty-two is the only time we have any mention of his ministry. We also don’t hear anything else about his opponent Zedekiah (the LORD is righteous) after this.

### **22:11 “Horns of iron”**

Horns in ancient Mesopotamia were symbols of deliverance and military strength. It is possible that Zedekiah is basing his false prophecy on God’s promise to Joseph (Ahab’s tribe) in Deuteronomy 33:13-17.

### **22:17 “as sheep that have no shepherd”**

The theme of this prophecy will be picked up again in Ezekiel 34 when God finally promises that he himself will shepherd his sheep. This of course is one of the prophecies that Jesus fulfills during his ministry (John 10:11-18).

### **22:23 “Now therefore behold, the LORD has put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these your prophets...”**

This is the only mention of a lying spirit in the Old Testament though not the only instance of God using a harmful spirit for his purposes. In 1 Samuel 18:10, for example, the LORD sends a “harmful spirit” to Saul, which preys upon his insecurities. This is a difficult reality to understand, and many different solutions have been proposed in the Church through the centuries. Though the possibility that God could permit a lying spirit to go and deceive someone is troubling, two things in particular are worth mentioning: (1) this action is undertaken as judgement for Ahab’s persistent rebellion and refusal to hear the word of the LORD again and again and (2) the LORD actually tells Ahab through Micaiah that he is being deceived. God sends the lying spirit to deceive and also tells Ahab that he is being deceived, leaving the choice up to Ahab. Psalm 18:26 tells us “with the purified you show yourself pure, and with the crooked you make yourself seem torturous.” Most important, in light of the reality that we can be deceived, is Jesus’ promise to give us his Holy Spirit who will lead us into all truth (John 16:13)

### **22:19 “I will disguise myself...”**

This action shows Ahab to be unscrupulous but it is also a dramatically significant moment: the king is voluntarily taking off the symbol of his office shortly before the kingdom is taken from him in death. Saul did something very similar in 1 Samuel 28:8, shortly before his own death on the battlefield.

**22:34 “A certain man drew his bow at random...”**

Ahab's death once again bears some striking similarities to the death of Saul in 1 Samuel 31. This man, killing the king “at random” makes Ahab's death humiliating and dishonorable.

**22:38 “the dogs licked up his blood...”**

Blood represents the life force or the soul of a person (eg. Lev 17:11). When dogs (the lowest of animals in ancient Israel) drink and prostitutes bathe in Ahab's blood, a significant comment is being made on the substance of Ahab's life.

**22:38 “According to the word of the LORD”**

We encountered this prophecy in last week's study (21:19). Ahab has finally gotten what was coming to him, in spite of all the warnings from the LORD's prophets. It is the climax and conclusion of Ahab's reign.

# Ruth // Elijah



## 2 KINGS 1

As we near the end of Elijah's earthly life we are given one last demonstration from him of the power and authority of the word of the Lord in Israel. Ahab has passed away "according to the word of the Lord" but we see that, tragically, Ahaziah is no different. Even though the LORD's authority and trustworthiness has been consistently on display, a hard heart and closed ears still characterize the king on Israel's throne. Again the authority of the LORD within Israel is challenged and vain attempts are made to overcome his word.



## 2 KINGS 1

STUDY 10

### ACT 1

#### 1 Kings 22

51 Ahaziah the son of Ahab began to reign over Israel in Samaria in the seventeenth year of Jehoshaphat king of Judah, and he reigned two years over Israel. 52 He did what was evil in the sight of the LORD and walked in the way of his father and in the way of his mother and in the way of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin. 53 He served Baal and worshiped him and provoked the LORD, the God of Israel, to anger in every way that his father had done.

### 2 Kings 1

1 After the death of Ahab, Moab rebelled against Israel.

### ACT 2

2 Now Ahaziah fell through the lattice in his upper chamber in Samaria, and lay sick; so he sent messengers, telling them, "Go, inquire of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron, whether I shall recover from this sickness." 3 But the angel of the LORD said to Elijah the Tishbite, "Arise, go up to meet the messengers of the king of Samaria, and say to them, 'Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are going to inquire of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron?' 4 Now therefore thus says the LORD, You shall not come down from the bed to which you have gone up, but you shall surely die." So Elijah went. 5 The messengers returned to the king, and he said to them, "Why have you returned?" 6 And they said to him, "There came a man to meet us, and said to us, 'Go back to the king who sent you, and say to him, Thus says the LORD, Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are sending to inquire of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron? Therefore you shall not come down from the bed to which you have gone up, but you shall surely die.'" 7 He said to them, "What kind of man was he who came to meet you and told you these things?" 8 They answered him, "He wore a garment of hair, with a belt of leather about his waist." And he said, "It is Elijah the Tishbite."

### ACT 3

9 Then the king sent to him a captain of fifty men with his fifty. He went up to Elijah, who was sitting on the top of a hill, and said to him, "O man of God, the king says, 'Come down.'" 10 But Elijah answered the captain of fifty, "If I am a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty." Then fire came down from heaven and consumed him and his fifty. 11 Again the king sent to him another captain of fifty men with his fifty. And he answered and said to him, "O man of God, this is the king's order, 'Come down quickly!'" 12 But Elijah answered them, "If I am a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty." Then the fire of God came down from heaven and consumed him and his fifty. 13 Again the king sent the captain of a third fifty with his fifty. And the third captain of fifty went up and came and fell on his knees before Elijah and entreated him, "O man of God, please let my life, and the life of these fifty servants of yours, be

precious in your sight. 14 Behold, fire came down from heaven and consumed the two former captains of fifty men with their fifties, but now let my life be precious in your sight.” 15 Then the angel of the LORD said to Elijah, “Go down with him; do not be afraid of him.” So he arose and went down with him to the king 16 and said to him, “Thus says the LORD, ‘Because you have sent messengers to inquire of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron—is it because there is no God in Israel to inquire of his word?—therefore you shall not come down from the bed to which you have gone up, but you shall surely die.’” 17 So he died according to the word of the LORD that Elijah had spoken. Jehoram became king in his place in the second year of Jehoram the son of Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, because Ahaziah had no son. 18 Now the rest of the acts of Ahaziah that he did, are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel?



## STEP 1. WHAT DOES IT SAY?

### A Pray

### B Look Closely At

- Repetitions, Contrasts, Surprises
- Big Bible Words
- Commands
- Promises
- Characters
- Dialogue – who is talking to whom?
- Setting (timeline and place) – does it change?

### C Look Structurally

- What kind of writing is this? (eg. narrative, poetry, parable, teaching)
- How does the plot unfold? (Conflict? Climax? Resolution?)

#### NEED SOME HELP?

If you need some help with steps 1-2, check out the study notes on page 102.

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### D A few questions to consider

- What reason does God give for sentencing the king to death? Is Ahaziah guilty by virtue of being Ahab's son only or is there more?
- Why did the king send soldiers for Elijah?
- How does the narrator use repetition in this chapter? What is its impact? What does it tell us about the severity of the message?

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## STUDY NOTES

### 1st & 2nd Kings.

While separated in our English translations, the books of Samuel, Kings and Chronicles are all in fact one book written over several scrolls. They were separated into different books by the first translators of the Greek version of the Old Testament, also known as the Septuagint. While no meaning is lost since the books can still be read together, it is worth keeping in mind that the original author didn't intend a break in the story between the death of Ahab in 1 Kings 22 and his son's taking over the kingdom in 2 Kings 1.

### 2 Kings 1:1 "After the death of Ahab, Moab rebelled against Israel."

Moab is one of the oldest neighbouring enemy nations of Israel. There are two important things to note about their rebellion. First, this rebellion made use of a tactic common in the ancient Near East. Whenever there was a transfer of power, it could be an opportunity to gain independence from your overlord. Ahab had proven himself militarily, so Moab kept the peace, but Ahaziah was not the same military man as his father and remained untested. Second and more importantly, this rebellion is a sign of God's disapproval and the first taste of a particular curse. In Deuteronomy 28 he promised that if Israel did not follow him faithfully upon entering the land, he would curse them by having them "serve their enemies" (Deut 28:45ff).

### 2 Kings 1:2 "...Go, inquire of Baal-zebub..."

Within this passage the narrator seems to be introducing some subtle mockery of Baal. Typically the Baal from Ekron is referred to as Baal-Zebul, the lord of princes, but in this passage that name becomes Baal-Zebub, the lord of the flies. This change within the text mainly serves to further demonstrate the uselessness of God's enemies and their titles. Elijah himself is also called a Baal (lord) in v.8, a Baal of Hair. The history of the term Baal-zebub is complex but, by the time of Jesus, it had become a generic term for an enemy of the LORD, with Beelzebub an alternate name for Satan. For example, it is a term used by the Pharisees within the Gospels to indict Jesus and his miracles of driving out demons (e.g. Luke 11:15).

### 2 Kings 1:2 "...the god of Ekron..."

This is not the first time God has tussled with the lords of Ekron. Ekron was one of the major Philistine towns that temporarily hosted the stolen Ark of the Covenant in 1 Samuel 5. After defeating the Philistine deity Dagon in his own temple at that time, the Ark was passed along through a number of towns because no one city wanted the wave of rodents and tumors that came as a judgement upon those who stole it.

### 2 Kings 1:9 "...on the top of a hill..."

This is perhaps an unhelpful translation as the Hebrew text makes special mention of the fact that Elijah is sitting on top of "the mountain." Some commentators argue that, rather than just any nonspecific hill, Elijah is, in fact, on Mount Carmel again, the location of the previous fiery showdown from 1 Kings chapter 18. The method God uses to deal with the king's soldiers who have come for Elijah strengthens this argument.

### 2 Kings 1:17 "...So he died according to the word of the LORD..."

Although Ahaziah, the main inheritor, is now deceased he is not the only son of Ahab. Jehoram the second son continues the line of Ahab and we can expect that God's punishment of this family is still being fulfilled and that the days of Ahab are not over. His family continues its various wicked deeds with Jehoram introducing Baal worship to the Southern Kingdom in 2 Kings 8. Eventually, along with his mother, the line of Ahab is completely destroyed and the word of God to him is completed. We should note that this is a different Jehoram from the Jehoram of Judah, who is the son of Jehoshaphat.



## 2 KINGS 2

Here at the end of our studies we have seen that even in the midst of the darkness, God's purposes cannot be thwarted. God promised in 1 Kings 19 that his work would not end with Elijah. His successor, Elisha, would continue calling the people of God back to the Lord. The battle against the kingdom of Ahab and Baal will see its conclusion later in 2 Kings. However, the battle against the king of darkness (beelzebub) will be fought and finally won by another king, descended from David, and not with the weapons of warfare but the cross.

This last chapter in our studies is concerned with the passing of the prophetic task to Elisha who asks for a "double portion of the spirit" of Elijah. God grants him this prayer, and his ministry will be marked by many mighty acts. In fact he does twice the number of Elijah's!



## 2 KINGS 2

### STUDY 11

#### ACT 1

Now when the LORD was about to take Elijah up to heaven by a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal. 2 And Elijah said to Elisha, "Please stay here, for the LORD has sent me as far as Bethel." But Elisha said, "As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So they went down to Bethel. 3 And the sons of the prophets who were in Bethel came out to Elisha and said to him, "Do you know that today the LORD will take away your master from over you?" And he said, "Yes, I know it; keep quiet." 4 Elijah said to him, "Elisha, please stay here, for the LORD has sent me to Jericho." But he said, "As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So they came to Jericho. 5 The sons of the prophets who were at Jericho drew near to Elisha and said to him, "Do you know that today the LORD will take away your master from over you?" And he answered, "Yes, I know it; keep quiet." 6 Then Elijah said to him, "Please stay here, for the LORD has sent me to the Jordan." But he said, "As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So the two of them went on. 7 Fifty men of the sons of the prophets also went and stood at some distance from them, as they both were standing by the Jordan.

#### ACT 2

8 Then Elijah took his cloak and rolled it up and struck the water, and the water was parted to the one side and to the other, till the two of them could go over on dry ground.

9 When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, "Ask what I shall do for you, before I am taken from you." And Elisha said, "Please let there be a double portion of your spirit on me." 10 And he said, "You have asked a hard thing; yet, if you see me as I am being taken from you, it shall be so for you, but if you do not see me, it shall not be so." 11 And as they still went on and talked, behold, chariots of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them. And Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven. 12 And Elisha saw it and he cried, "My father, my father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!" And he saw him no more. Then he took hold of his own clothes and tore them in two pieces. 13 And he took up the cloak of Elijah that had fallen from him and went back and stood on the bank of the Jordan. 14 Then he took the cloak of Elijah that had fallen from him and struck the water, saying, "Where is the LORD, the God of Elijah?" And when he had struck the water, the water was parted to the one side and to the other, and Elisha went over.

#### ACT 3

15 Now when the sons of the prophets who were at Jericho saw him opposite them, they said, "The spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha." And they came to meet him and bowed to the ground before him. 16 And they said to him, "Behold now, there are with your servants fifty strong men. Please let them go and seek your master. It may be that the Spirit of the Lord has caught him up and cast him upon some mountain or into some valley." And he said, "You shall not send." 17 But when they urged him till he was ashamed, he said, "Send." They sent therefore



fifty men. And for three days they sought him but did not find him. 18 And they came back to him while he was staying at Jericho, and he said to them, "Did I not say to you, 'Do not go'?"

#### **ACT 4**

Now the men of the city said to Elisha, "Behold, the situation of this city is pleasant, as my lord sees, but the water is bad, and the land is unfruitful." 20 He said, "Bring me a new bowl, and put salt in it." So they brought it to him. 21 Then he went to the spring of water and threw salt in it and said, "Thus says the LORD, I have healed this water; from now on neither death nor miscarriage shall come from it." 22 So the water has been healed to this day, according to the word that Elisha spoke.

#### **ACT 5**

23 He went up from there to Bethel, and while he was going up on the way, some small boys came out of the city and jeered at him, saying, "Go up, you baldhead! Go up, you baldhead!" 24 And he turned around, and when he saw them, he cursed them in the name of the LORD. And two she-bears came out of the woods and tore forty-two of the boys. 25 From there he went on to Mount Carmel, and from there he returned to Samaria.

## STEP 1. WHAT DOES IT SAY?

### A Pray

### B Look Closely At

- Repetitions, Contrasts, Surprises
- Big Bible Words
- Commands
- Promises
- Characters
- Dialogue – who is talking to whom?
- Setting (timeline and place) – does it change?

### C Look Structurally

- What kind of writing is this? (eg. narrative, poetry, parable, teaching)
- How does the plot unfold? (Conflict? Climax? Resolution?)

#### NEED SOME HELP?

If you need some help with steps 1-2, check out the study notes on page 111.

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### D A few questions to consider

- Take note of the use and impact of repetitions in this passage. Why do you think the author does this?
- In the passage several places are mentioned: take a little time to read the background noted below. How does it help us understand what is happening here?

**Gilgal:** is where Joshua first settled in the land after crossing the river Jordan in Joshua 4:19-2. They set up 12 stones as a memorial, taken from the bottom of the Jordan, signalling vividly that the Lord had delivered them out of Egypt and brought them safely to the land. God declared that they tell their children that He alone is mighty and they should fear the Lord their God forever.

**Jericho:** is the first city the Israelites conquered in the land (Joshua 6) and, as Joshua warned, must not be rebuilt. We find in 1 Kings 16:31 that, in defiance of the Lord, Heil rebuilds the city but that both of his sons perish as Joshua warned.

**Jordan:** is where Israel, led by Joshua, crossed into the land. God parted the waters just as he did with Moses at the Red Sea (Joshua 3:7-24).  
Elijah leaves the land by crossing the Jordan and Elisha re-enters the land, also parting the river.

**Bethel:** Elisha goes back into Israel's territory and passes the royal sanctuary where in 1 Kings 12:28-33 King Jeroboam had set up a golden calf. It became the centre of idolatry and national apostasy









## STUDY NOTES

### 2:1 “Elijah and Elisha were on their way...”

Elijah’s name means “The LORD is my God” and Elisha’s name means “My God is salvation,” closely aligning with the name Joshua (“The LORD saves.”) which is also Jesus’ Hebrew name. Elisha’s last name is “Shaphat” which means “judgement”. There is a lot going on here with the connections between Elijah/Elisha, Moses/Joshua, John/Jesus, Jesus/Church, that are worth taking note of.

### 2:9 “let there be a double portion of your spirit”

Elisha is essentially asking to be the first born heir to Elijah’s ministry (See Deut 21:17.) He is not seeking double of what Elijah had, but is requesting recognition as legitimate successor to Elijah. Elijah responds by putting that result into the hands of the Lord. At the same time, Elijah seems reluctant to pass the mantle to Elisha despite the young man’s wholehearted commitment to the call of God. Is Elijah unwilling to relinquish his ministry? Is he testing Elisha’s determination as Jesus does his followers in a similar manner? Or is he reluctant to pass on the burden that ministry, conducted amongst hostile people, brings?

### 2:11 “chariots of fire and horses of fire.”

Chariots and horses usually mark the presence of an invading enemy army. But here we briefly see the veil of heaven opened and the heavenly hosts revealed, who support the people of God at God’s command. Later in 2 Kings 6:8-19 the same mighty hosts of the LORD deliver Elisha from the Syrian army.

### 2:11 “And Elijah went up...”

This is the only account of an ascension in the Bible except for that of the Lord Jesus Christ. Together with Elisha, Elijah seems, in part, to “foreshadow” the ministry of the Lord Jesus.

### 2:23 “Go up, you baldhead”

This passage, where judgement falls on some “small boys” seems needlessly harsh. There are a few things to note. Firstly, the translation “small boys” is uncertain. In Hebrew *na’ar* could mean anything from toddlers to armed young men. (The young man in Ruth 2:5 working in Boaz’s field is also *na’ar* for example.) Secondly, the word for small (*qatan*) can indicate size, age, or significance. Another way to translate the phrase would be “insignificant kids.” Thirdly, the call to “go up” may be a challenge to the prophet to “go up” and worship at the temple of Baal. Lastly, the taunt “baldhead” can be read as a mockery of the prophetic role of Elisha who, in contrast to the very hairy Elijah, is bald. Taken one way this encounter is actually a brazen challenge by a gang of young adult males to God’s newly appointed prophet.

