

Lecture 9: Ruth, Hannah's Song, and the Fall of Saul

Introduction to Biblical Theology · Dr. Thomas Schreiner · The Master's Seminary · 27 minutes

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Before you watch

A famine, two graves, and a Moabite widow who will not let go: Ruth is the story of a bitter providence already turning. Dr. Schreiner follows Ruth under the LORD's wings, through the kinsman-redeemer, to a genealogy that ends at a throne, then opens the book of Samuel between its two great songs, where Hannah prophesies a king and Saul shows what a king must never be. Listen for the God who brings low and lifts up.

The lecture, section by section

1. A bitter providence

Ruth opens with a family's suffering inside a nation's suffering, for famine is a covenant curse. Yet the narrator never blames Naomi's losses on her personal sin, and when she says the Almighty has made her life bitter, she is not speaking wrongly; she is owning God's sovereignty in the dark, the way Jonathan Edwards' widow bowed under her blow precisely because she knew whose hand held the rod. And the reader is allowed to see what Naomi cannot: the very circumstances she calls bitter are the ones God is already turning.

2. Ruth's clinging: a story of conversion

Ruth clings to Naomi, and the word is *dabaq*, Deuteronomy's covenant word and the marriage word, leave and cleave. Her clinging to Naomi is a clinging to Naomi's God: she leaves her people and her gods and holds fast to the LORD. That is what conversion is. And she does it as a Moabite in a world where people and gods were fused, where changing gods meant tearing loose from everything, which makes her turning a wonder, and a first hint that Abraham's blessing is headed for the nations.

3. Under his wings

Boaz blesses her in the book's key sentence: a full reward from the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge. It is a beautiful anatomy of saving faith. The reward is not wages, because what Ruth did was take refuge: she trusted, and trusting, she was saved.

4. But Moabites were excluded

Deuteronomy bars the Moabite from the LORD's assembly to the tenth generation, and yet here is Ruth, inside. Perhaps the ban admitted exceptions; perhaps it did not reach a Moabite joined to Israel; perhaps the assembly meant something narrower. Schreiner holds the details loosely and the conclusion firmly: she is clearly included, and her inclusion preaches: grace outruns the fence.

5. The kinsman-redeemer

Boaz acts as the family redeemer, buying back the land and taking Ruth so that offspring can be raised for the dead, and Ruth, on the threshing floor, asks him to spread his wing over her, the very word Boaz had used of the LORD. Did anything improper happen that night? Schreiner thinks not: the narrator has just called Ruth a noble woman, and the story presents Boaz and Ruth as model disciples, diamonds in a dark age.

6. Naomi was never empty

Naomi came home saying she was empty, and the LORD was filling her hands the whole time. The book ends with a genealogy, and the genealogy ends at David: the Moabite widow is great-grandmother to the coming king. Dominion and dynasty, hiding in a Bethlehem family.

7. Samuel between two songs

First and Second Samuel are one book, and Schreiner reads it between two bookends: Hannah's song near the beginning and David's song near the end. The bookends are the narrator's own key, telling the reader what the whole sprawling story is about: the LORD who brings low and lifts up is bringing his king.

8. Hannah's song: the God who reverses

Hannah has just received the child she wept for, and her song is almost entirely about God: no one is holy like the LORD; there is no rock like our God. Do not speak proudly, she sings, and the book obeys her outline: the arrogant, Hophni and Phinehas seizing the fat portions, Saul boasting and excusing, are broken, while the feeble are girded with strength; the barren bears seven; the LORD raises the poor from the dust to seat them with princes, which is David's whole biography in one line. And she ends beyond her own horizon: the LORD will give strength to his king and exalt the horn of his anointed, when Israel has no king at all. Hannah is prophesying, and Mary will one day take up her song.

9. David's song answers

At the far end, 2 Samuel 22 answers her: the LORD is David's rock and fortress, thundering from heaven as Hannah said he would. David sings that the LORD rewarded him according to his righteousness, and the narrator agrees: for all David's sin, his exaltation came along the road of remarkable, trusting obedience. Those who honor the LORD, he honors, a truth fulfilled perfectly only in the Lord Jesus, who always obeyed.

10. Worthless priests and a wandering ark

Eli's sons, worthless men who did not know the LORD, treat the ark as a talisman and carry it into battle; the LORD lets it be captured rather than be used. Then, in Dagon's temple, the captured ark needs no army: Israel's God topples the idol on its face and breaks it apart. The LORD defends his own glory.

11. Was asking for a king wrong?

First Samuel 8 indicts Israel for demanding a king, yet kingship was God's plan from Genesis 17, 35, and 49 and Numbers 24. The sin lay in the motive: they wanted a king like all the nations, a substitute for the LORD rather than his instrument. And so God's good plan advances, as it so often does, through and despite human sinfulness.

12. Saul: a new Adam who unravels

Saul begins humbly and victoriously, a new Adam at the literary level, and then unravels. At Gilgal he cannot wait for Samuel and offers the sacrifice himself: I forced myself, he explains. Told to devote Amalek to destruction, he spares Agag and the best of the flocks: for sacrifice, he explains. Samuel's reply stands over every generation of religion: does the LORD delight in offerings as in obedience? To obey is better than sacrifice; rebellion is as the sin of divination; because you have rejected the word of the LORD, he has rejected you as king. Only at the end does Saul name his real motive: I feared the people. He ends like Adam, a bright beginning falling in a garden of victories, and Schreiner turns it to the pastorate: guard your heart, live accountable, stay close to the Lord, and if a leader falls, let him say I sinned, without the litany of excuses.

Scripture in this lecture

Ruth 1, 2, 3, 4; Deuteronomy 23; 1 Samuel 2, 4, 5, 8, 13, 15; 2 Samuel 22; Luke 1; Genesis 17, 35, 49; Numbers 24

Key terms

Bitter providence

Naomi's confession that the Almighty's hand lay in her losses: sovereignty owned in the dark, while God was already turning the story.

Clinging, dabaq

Ruth cleaves to Naomi and to Naomi's God: conversion as leaving false gods and holding fast to the LORD.

Under his wings

Ruth 2's picture of saving faith: refuge taken, not wages earned.

Kinsman-redeemer

The relative with the right to buy back land and raise up offspring for the dead: Boaz's role, and redemption's vocabulary ever after.

The bookend songs

Hannah's song and David's song framing the book of Samuel: the LORD who brings low and lifts up, giving strength to his king.

To obey is better than sacrifice

Samuel's verdict on Saul: religious performance can never stand in for obedience to God's word.

Comprehension check

Circle your answers, then check them against the key on the last page.

1. What does Naomi's bitterness confess about God?
 - A. That God had abandoned her
 - B. His sovereignty over her suffering, even while he was quietly turning it
 - C. That her own sins caused the famine
 - D. That Moab's gods were stronger
2. What does Ruth's clinging to Naomi represent?
 - A. Family duty and nothing more
 - B. Fear of traveling alone
 - C. A legal formality of the time
 - D. Conversion: leaving her people and her gods to hold fast to the LORD
3. How does Ruth 2 picture saving faith?
 - A. Taking refuge under the LORD's wings
 - B. Earning wages in the field
 - C. Keeping the gleaning laws
 - D. Offering sacrifice at Bethlehem
4. Deuteronomy excluded Moabites, yet Ruth is welcomed. What does the lecture conclude?
 - A. The narrator forgot the law
 - B. Ruth was secretly an Israelite
 - C. However the exclusion is explained, Ruth is clearly included: grace outruns the fence
 - D. Boaz knowingly broke the law
5. What happened on the threshing floor, in the lecture's judgment?
 - A. A secret marriage ceremony
 - B. Nothing improper: the narrator presents Ruth as a noble woman and both as model disciples
 - C. A sin later repented of
 - D. The text cannot be understood
6. How does the book of Ruth end?
 - A. With Naomi's death
 - B. With another famine
 - C. With a battle against Moab
 - D. With a genealogy reaching to David: the widow is great-grandmother of the coming king
7. What does the lecture call the interpretive key to the book of Samuel?
 - A. The songs of Hannah and David, the book's two bookends
 - B. The list of David's mighty men
 - C. The ark narratives
 - D. Saul's genealogy

8. What does Hannah's song prophesy at its close?
 - A. Samuel's future alone
 - B. The temple's construction
 - C. Strength for the LORD's king and his anointed, before Israel had any king
 - D. The coming exile
9. Why was Israel indicted for requesting a king when kingship was God's plan?
 - A. Kings were never God's plan
 - B. Their motive was wrong: they wanted a king like all the nations
 - C. Samuel wanted the throne himself
 - D. The request came in the wrong year
10. What was Saul's pattern when confronted with his disobedience?
 - A. Immediate repentance
 - B. Complete silence
 - C. Blaming Samuel alone
 - D. Excuses at every turn, until the real motive appeared: fear of the people
11. Complete Samuel's verdict: to obey is better than what?
 - A. Sacrifice
 - B. Fasting
 - C. Silver and gold
 - D. Victory in battle
12. How does Saul's story end, in the lecture's framing?
 - A. In restored kingship
 - B. In quiet retirement
 - C. Like Adam: a promising beginning ending in rejection, for rejecting the word of the LORD
 - D. In exile in Moab

Talk it over

1. Naomi called her providence bitter and was right, and God was already turning it and she could not see. Where might both of those be true in your life at once, and what does Ruth teach you to do in the meantime?
2. Hannah answered a long-awaited birth with a song almost entirely about God. What do your own prayers of thanksgiving reveal about where your treasure sits?
3. Saul offered sacrifices while disobeying the word, and his excuses held until the real motive surfaced: fear of people. Where does the fear of people dress itself up as devotion in your life?

One verse to carry

1 Samuel 2:10, Hannah's prophecy before any throne existed: the LORD will judge the ends of the earth; he will give strength to his king and lift up the horn of his anointed.

Go further

The lecture leans again on Stephen Dempster's *Dominion and Dynasty*, whose two title words meet in Ruth's closing genealogy.

ANSWER KEY

Lecture 9 Comprehension Check

1. B. His sovereignty over her suffering, even while he was quietly turning it (*outline section 1*)
2. D. Conversion: leaving her people and her gods to hold fast to the LORD (*outline section 2*)
3. A. Taking refuge under the LORD's wings (*outline section 3*)
4. C. However the exclusion is explained, Ruth is clearly included: grace outruns the fence (*outline section 4*)
5. B. Nothing improper: the narrator presents Ruth as a noble woman and both as model disciples (*outline section 5*)
6. D. With a genealogy reaching to David: the widow is great-grandmother of the coming king (*outline section 6*)
7. A. The songs of Hannah and David, the book's two bookends (*outline section 7*)
8. C. Strength for the LORD's king and his anointed, before Israel had any king (*outline section 8*)
9. B. Their motive was wrong: they wanted a king like all the nations (*outline section 11*)
10. D. Excuses at every turn, until the real motive appeared: fear of the people (*outline section 12*)
11. A. Sacrifice (*outline section 12*)
12. C. Like Adam: a promising beginning ending in rejection, for rejecting the word of the LORD (*outline section 12*)