**Introduction to Ruth**

**“But God…”**

**Scripture:** Judges and Ruth (select verses)

**Memory Verse:** Romans 5:8 *“But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”*

**Lesson Focus:** That God has good plans even in the darkest and hardest of times. We will spend most of the lesson looking at the very dark moral and religious state of Israel when the events of Ruth took place to demonstrate that even despite such horrible national sin, “**but God**”.

**Introduction:**

Important questions to establish context and background of any book of the Bible.

1. **What?:** The 8th book of the Bible, this book is a glimmer of hope amidst the dark times of the Judges. It centers round the virtuous life of Ruth and how God uses her to accomplish His purposes.
2. **Who?:** Most experts believe it was written by the prophet Samuel. This is the same Samuel whom God called as a young boy to be a leader in Israel. (1 Samuel 3)
3. **When?:** Most experts believe it was written ~1000 years before Jesus Christ.
4. **Why?:** Probably the most significant reason for this book is for God to show His grace in using a humble foreigner, Ruth, to bring about His purposes of redemption both for Israel (thru David) and eventually for all people (thru Jesus).

**Activities and Crafts:** Coloring Picture of “Light in Darkness”, Word Search of different terms from lesson, Make It Real Discussion for 3rd – 5th.

Craft for 1st & 2nd: Light in the darkness paper snowflake

**Starter Activity:** Rigged Quiz: This “rigged” quiz game will demonstrate that when people make up their own rules, chaos ensues. You are going to ask a few “easy” Bible trivia questions (like what was Jesus’ mother’s name, or who can tell me one of the 10 commandments, etc.) to the class and the one rule is that you CANNOT shout out the answer, but you must raise your hand to be picked on. However, one person (I would recommend another leader and not a student) will be planted to always shout out the answer. When you correct them that they must raise their hand (maybe after the second or third questions), they are to respond, “those may be your rules, but they aren’t my rules”. Using this response, explain to the class that this game, or any game, does not work if we just make up our own rules.

**Bible Study: (Judges on “Fast Forward”)**

**Judges 2:7**: This verse at the beginning of Judges summarizes the victory that the Lord gave His people Israel as they were devoted to Him and obeyed Him. Perhaps refer to the fall of Jericho where God showed up big (Joshua 6). All was going so well, BUT….

**Judges 2:10-11**: Uh-oh! Thus begins the downward spiral of Israel. Notice that the “next generation” did not know the Lord nor care about Him. Adults weren’t teaching the children! This is why we teach these kiddos God’s word, so that they will know him and then teach their children, who will teach their children!

**Judges 3:12-14**: The people of Israel became slaves of the Moabites because they did not follow the Lord. This is an important point that will be brought out later because Ruth was from Moab. She was from a group of people that were enemies of the Israelites at this time!

**Judges 10:10-14**: These verses characterize the pattern of the book of Judges. The people ignore God, He punishes them, they repent, he restores them, they ignore Him again, God punishes them again, etc. But notice v. 13:

Q: What is it that God wanted from the Israelites more than anything else?

A: Relationship! He was angry because they had “forsaken” Him. That means they had turned their back on God, despite all God had done for them.

***Key Point: “Rules without Relationship = Rebellion”***

Israel was probably tired of the rules that God gave them and liked the other popular, but false “Baal” gods who didn’t have rules. But they forgot that God’s rules were given for their good! God did give Israel rules/laws, like the 10 commandments. But is He a distant tyrant God who barks out orders from a distance or does He give commandments for good?

Q: Ask the kids what some of the 10 commandments are (Exodus 20). Stress the one’s about how we should treat one another. Don’t we all want to live where we are safe from getting our stuff stolen, where people tell the truth, where people aren’t murdered, etc.? What happens if people don’t obey those rules?

**Deuteronomy 10:12-13**: These verses show God’s heart. ***His rules were for their good*** (v. 13). He wanted their love and devotion, not just obedience. He wanted what was best for them. But they didn’t want God messing with their lives. They wanted to make their own rules!

**Judges 21:25**: This verse brings us back to the rigged quiz at the beginning. Israel had rejected God’s rules as well as God Himself. Therefore, they were left with making up their own rules. And what did the rigged quiz show this resulted in? Chaos! (suffering, darkness, bloodshed, confusion, a giant mess).

**Bible Study: (Ruth 1:1-5)**

Now with the stage set, we will introduce the book of Ruth. The main point to bring out is that even in **bad** times, God is working to accomplishing His **good** plans.

Ruth 1:1: Famine and fleeing

* Q: What is famine? Can you imagine how hard life would be if you did not have food? We should assume that God brought this famine as part of His punishment of Israel’s sin.
* Bethlehem: This should give us a hint at how God is working in this story!
* Q: Who knows why the city of Bethlehem is important? (birthplace of Jesus 1000 years later)
* Moab: Refer back to Judges 3:12-14; the people of Moab were the enemies of Israel. It would be kinda like us fleeing to live in the land of North Korea or ISIS!

Ruth 1:2-3: Family in a foreign land

* The family flees to enemy territory to find food and then the father dies. Things appear to be getting worse and not better!

Ruth 1:4: Enter Ruth

* She enters the story when she marries one of the sons. The name Ruth comes from the Hebrew word for friend or companion. We will see how she lives up to that name as we continue our study the next few weeks!

Ruth 1:5: Bad to Worse

* Naomi now has lost both her husband and her sons and is living in a foreign land where she knows no one. Being a widow in ancient times was terribly dangerous. Ruth and Orpah were also widows and it appears to be a hopeless situation.

**But God!**

We will stop our study of Ruth here. This is kinda like reading the story of Snow White and stopping right after she eats the apple!

Read Matthew 1:5 to give a preview of how God will bring good out of all of this bad. This is the genealogy of Jesus.

Q: Who do we see inserted in the messianic line of Jesus? Ruth!

God allows badness in the world to bring about goodness. God will use Ruth to bring about the Messiah, Jesus. Therefore, Ruth is part of God’s rescue plan of John 3:16!

Our memory verse (Romans 5:8) also reinforces how God, because of His great love, broke through and rescued us, even when we were lost in our own sin and darkness.

**Scripture from Lesson: Judges and Ruth 1:1-5**

**Lesson Theme: “But God…”**

**Memory Verse:** Romans 5:8 *“But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”*

**Teachers/Parents: Consider sharing with your students, if appropriate, an experience that was really hard for you when you didn’t understand what God was doing. But afterwards you looked back and saw “but God” worked things together for your good. (Romans 8:28)**

**Discussion Questions:**

1. What happens when everyone just “does what is right in their own eyes”? (Judges 21:25)
2. How do we know what is right and wrong? (Psalm 119:105)
3. Read Proverbs 12:15. How does God describe the person who does “what is right in his own eyes”? What does the wise person do?
4. **Rules without Relationship = Rebellion.** This characterizes the state of Israel towards God during the time of Ruth. Why is relationship so important to help us obey rules?
5. Read Deuteronomy 10:12-13. Do you believe God’s rules are for your good?
6. Have you ever had a shot at the doctor’s office before? They seem to be “bad” in that they hurt for an instant, but do you see how they are actually for our good (to protect us from disease)?
7. Even despite the sin and evil rampant in Israel, “but God” is working His rescue plan of redemption and love out by bringing Ruth in, for she will become part of the Messianic line to Jesus (Matthew 1:5), the Savior of the world. Do you believe God’s plan is good?
8. Even despite our own sin and evil, “but God” sent His Son for us that we would turn from our sin and turn to Him in faith (Romans 5:8). Read Ephesians 2:1-5. Notice “but God” in v. 4. Have you received God’s free gift of forgiveness by grace?