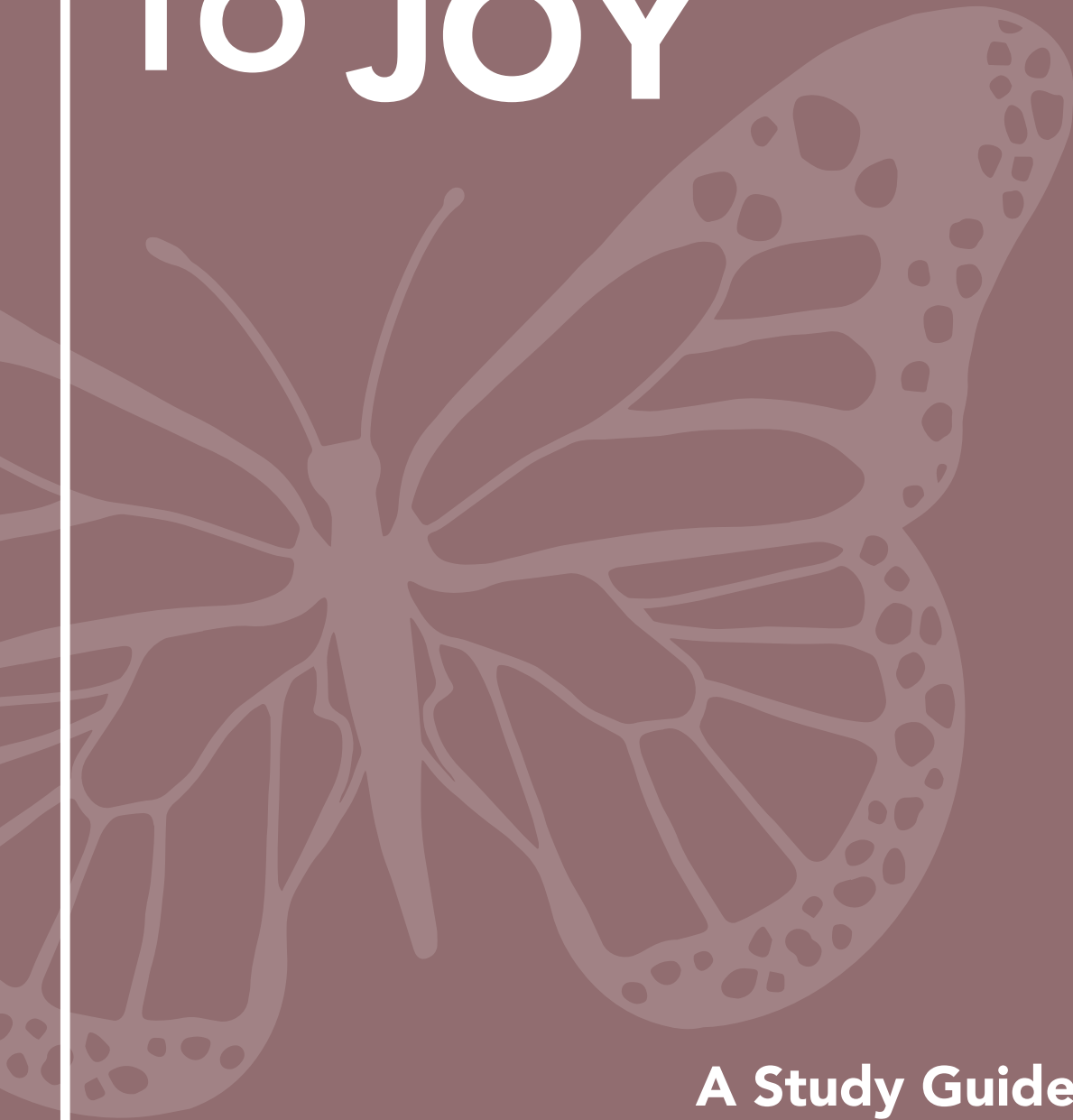


A STUDY IN RUTH

FROM DISAPPOINTMENT TO JOY



**A Study Guide for Use by
Individuals or Groups**

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From Disappointment to Joy by Brenda J. Richman

Published by Faith and Fellowship Press
Box 655
Fergus Falls, MN 56538-0655

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FROM DISAPPOINTMENT TO JOY

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INTRODUCTION

Turbulence and unrest characterized the period of the Judges. The Israelites were weak politically and spiritually. Tribal jealousies, foreign oppression, and idolatry set in and gained strongholds in the life of the nation.

Against this historical backdrop, the story of Ruth presents a different side of life. The real joys and sorrows of a godly family are displayed. Ruth, a Moabite who became a worshiper of Israel's God, exhibited faith and loyalty that were rare in Israel during that time. Ruth occupies an important place in Israelite history because she became an ancestor of King David and of Jesus.

The book of Ruth is a Hebrew short story. It reveals the customs of the times. An incomparable love story, it shows what family life was like in ancient Israel. But it is more. The theological message of the book lies in its powerful portrayal of the sovereign purpose of God working through all of the joys and tragedies of life. That message hasn't changed in the nearly 2400 years since Ruth was written. God still works his sovereign purposes through our disappointments and joys today.

LESSON 1

THE REALITY OF DISAPPOINTMENTS

RUTH 1:1-22

OPENER

Tell about a time when you experienced a great disappointment.

INTRODUCTION

As a Hebrew short story, the Old Testament book of Ruth beautifully tells the story of ordinary people going about their quiet lives. It is the story of great human devotion under the guidance and blessing of God. Most importantly, Ruth is a story about God, although God is never directly mentioned. Ruth is especially significant because it shows the lineage of Jesus. Even though she was a common, Gentile woman, Ruth was a direct ancestor of Jesus Christ.

The book of Ruth shows common people living out the trials and joys of everyday life. It tells their story in a way that shows that God is active in human affairs. He blesses them that trust him.

As you start this study, read the entire book of Ruth, which contains only 85 verses. In the space below, note all the ways you see God working in everyday life throughout the story.

AN ISRAELITE FAMILY IN MOAB (1:1-5)

1. Verses 1-5 give the setting of the story of Ruth. What do you already know about the story from these five verses? From these verses, try to answer the questions: who, what, where, when, why, and how.

2. What was it like to be a widow at this time? How do you think widows were treated in the ancient world?

3. This must have been a difficult time for Naomi. What were the many disappointments and trials Naomi was facing? How do you think she felt? How did she respond?

4. When have you felt like Naomi?

10. What did this response mean for Ruth? What were the implications for her personally? Why do you think she responded in this way?

11. When have you chosen to stick with something that has been difficult? What were the results?

THE ARRIVAL IN BETHLEHEM (1:19-22)

12. How do verses 20-21 show Naomi's response to life's disappointments? How does this compare to the apostle Paul's response? (See Philippians 2:12-26.)

13. Compare and contrast the responses of Naomi, Ruth, and Orpah to life's difficulties. Which do you admire the most? Why?

- a. Naomi

b. Ruth

c. Orpah

14. What disappointments and stresses have you faced this year? In what ways did you respond like Naomi, Orpah, or Ruth?

15. Having studied this chapter of Ruth, how will you be better prepared to face life's disappointments?

REFLECT

We will always have trials and disappointments in life. It is not the fact that we have them, but how we deal with them that is important. We can become bitter like Naomi, run away like Orpah, or let the Lord mold us through them like Ruth. God longs to shape our character after his image.

How can you view your disappointments as an opportunity to let God work?

a. Romans 5:1-5

b. 2 Corinthians 8:2-5

c. James 1:12

d. 1 Peter 1:6-7

LESSON 2

THE REWARDS OF FAITHFULNESS

RUTH 2:1-17

OPENER

When have you received an award or reward for something you did? How did it make you feel?

INTRODUCTION

In Ruth 1:16, we saw Ruth's commitment to Naomi and Naomi's God, "Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God." Ruth continues this faithful devotion and starts to see the rewards in this chapter.

RUTH'S PROVISION FOR NAOMI (2:1-3)

1. You are teaching a class of seven year olds. One of them asks you what the word *faithfulness* means. What would you say?

7. Although she is quite vulnerable in the harvest fields as a single young woman, and a foreigner, Ruth undertakes to provide for her mother-in-law. How does this show Ruth's faithfulness?

8. Describe a time when a friend was loyal to you even though it was difficult.

9. It is amazing that of all the fields Ruth could have chosen, she unknowingly picked one owned by Boaz. What do you think "As it turned out" in verse three means? How does this relate to Romans 8:28?

10. When have you seen God work out an amazing situation that appeared to be coincidence?

BOAZ'S PROVISION FOR RUTH (2:4-17)

11. Ruth's reputation of faithfulness traveled ahead of her. What do verses 11-12 say about her character?

12. God blessed Ruth's faithfulness in many ways. Discuss the specific rewards Ruth received in this chapter.

13. Discuss times when you have experienced the rewards of faithfulness either to another person or to God.

14. According to the following verses, what are the rewards of faithfulness?

a. Psalm 18:25

b. Psalm 97:10

c. Proverbs 28:20

d. Revelation 2:10

15. Read Matthew 26:37-42 and Matthew 27:33-56. How was Jesus faithful? What benefits or rewards were and are experienced because of his faithfulness?

16. When do you find it difficult to be faithful to God? How is Jesus' faithfulness an inspiration?

REFLECT

Being faithful to a friend can be hard work. Often, it is even harder to remain faithful to God. Ridicule from others, or our own doubts, may tempt us to take the easy way. God rewards the faithful person. We may experience the rewards of our faithfulness here on earth like Ruth did, or we may not experience the rewards until we reach heaven.

How is God calling you to apply what you have learned about faithfulness from Ruth chapter two?

3. Ruth gleaned an ephah of barley (about 3/5 bushel or 22 liters). This was an unusually large amount for one day's gleaning. Why do you think Naomi reacted the way she did?

4. The kinsman-redeemer that Naomi refers to in verse 20 was the closest living male relative responsible for protecting the interests of needy members of the extended family. In what specific ways was he to do this?
 - a. Deuteronomy 25:5-10

 - b. Leviticus 25:47-49

 - c. Leviticus 25:25-28, Ruth 4:3-4

5. Do you think Naomi dares to hope in these provisions or is she still feeling like Mara? How has this change been brought about?

6. How do unexpected blessings help you to see the hand of God working through disappointments as well?

7. Read Luke 17:11-19. How did the lepers respond to Jesus' blessing? Why do you think one responded differently than the rest? How do you respond to God's blessings in your life?

8. In what ways is Boaz as kinsman-redeemer symbolic of Jesus? (See Galatians 4:4-9; Titus 2:13-14; and Titus 3:5-8.)

9. How do you see Jesus as your personal kinsman-redeemer? In what ways has he redeemed you?

10. Because Jesus Christ is our kinsman-redeemer, we have the greatest blessing of all, a place in his family. What are some of the other blessings in your life?

11. What non-material blessings do you have?

12. Some Christians have many possessions, others have little. Is the person with more, more blessed by God? (See 1 Timothy 6:17, Matthew 19:23-24; Luke 6:24.)

13. The Psalmist says, "Blessed are the people whose God is the Lord" (Psalm 144:15). What does it mean for you to be blessed by God?

REFLECT

The greatest blessing we can ever have is to find peace with God. Because Jesus purchased us with his blood, he is our kinsman-redeemer. Have you ever received his gift and become a part of his family? If you have never received God's gift of salvation, or have turned away from it, take time now to receive his offer. If you have received his gift of salvation, thank him for the blessings of forgiveness and of being a part of God's family.

Spend some time thinking about the numerous blessings that God has given you and thank him for each one.

LESSON 4

THE RESULTS OF OBEDIENCE

RUTH 3:1-18

OPENER

Discuss a time when obedience resulted in something good in your life.

INTRODUCTION

In the last chapter, Ruth and Naomi see God's blessing in their lives as Ruth shows her dedication to providing for Naomi. Now, in chapter three, Naomi responds by providing for Ruth. Although she knows it will change their relationship, she wants Ruth to have a husband and a home. Thus, she devises a plan to find a husband for Ruth. Ruth responds with trust and obedience towards Naomi.

NAOMI'S PLAN (3:1-5)

1. What advice or instructions did Naomi give to Ruth? What was the goal of their plan?

2. As a foreigner, unfamiliar with the culture, what do you think Ruth would have thought about Naomi's advice?

3. How does Ruth's obedience affect her life? What would her life have been like if she would have ignored Naomi's advice?

4. When in your life have you taken the advice of someone you trusted even against your own judgment? What were the results?

RUTH AT THE THRESHING FLOOR (3:6-13)

5. What factors could lead one to believe a sexual indiscretion took place?

6. According to Israelite tradition, Ruth's actions had a cultural meaning. Uncovering Boaz's feet was not a sexually forward move, but a way to make sure that he would awake on a cold night. "Spreading the cover of one's garment" signified a request for marriage and an offer to protect (See Ezekiel 16:8). What other factors assure you that, in fact, no sexual encounter took place?

7. How does Ruth show her obedience in this situation which could have been morally tempting? How does Boaz show his character?

8. When have you been in a situation where moral compromise would have been easy? How were you able to be obedient to God? What were the results?

9. According to the following verses, what help do we have in times of temptation?

a. 1 Corinthians 10:13

b. Hebrews 4:15

c. 2 Peter 2:9

d. Romans 8:26

RUTH'S RETURN HOME (3:14-18)

10. What differences were there between Ruth and Boaz? Why would he be an unlikely choice for marriage? What does Ruth's request, despite their differences, say about her obedience to God?

11. According to verse 11, what was Ruth's reputation? How did Boaz show respect for it in verse 14? What is the importance of reputation? What relationship, if any, does it have to obedience?

12. When have you obeyed God in something that was difficult for you? What were the results?

13. When is it especially difficult for you to be obedient?

14. What do these New Testament passages have to say about obedience and its results?

- a. Romans 6:16

b. John 14:15, 23-24

c. Acts 5:32

d. 1 John 3:21-24

15. The results of obedience are not always immediate or visible. Why is it still worth being obedient?

REFLECT

Obedience does not come through self-effort. We cannot make ourselves more obedient by trying harder. Jesus empowers us to be obedient by his death and resurrection. Because of his perfect obedience, we are righteous before God and empowered to live righteous lives.

In what situation is God asking you to be obedient? Are you willing to give up control of your life and trust him? What do you think the results of obedience will be in this situation? Think about and pray through one area of your life that you need to turn over to God in obedience this week.

LESSON 5

THE RISK OF INTEGRITY

RUTH 4:1-12

OPENER

Tell about a childhood experience where you or someone you know got caught telling a lie.

INTRODUCTION

Everyone groans when “To be continued...” appears on the screen at the end of an intriguing movie. At the end of the last chapter, Ruth was left waiting to see what Boaz would do about her request for marriage. In chapter four we see how he follows through. His actions show us the character of Boaz. He is a man of great integrity. His integrity, however, did not come without risk.

1. How do you define integrity?

2. Give an example of someone you know who has integrity. What makes you think of that one as a person of integrity?

8. There are many other examples of people in the Bible who were people of integrity. Look up the verses below and discuss how the person showed integrity and the risk that integrity involved.

a. Job 2:1-10

b. Genesis 39

c. Mark 12:13-17

9. Why is it sometimes hard to be a person of integrity? Is it ever right in any situation to lie or stretch the truth? If so, when? If not, why?

10. List specific areas where Christians might be tempted to compromise their integrity.

11. What can you do to help maintain integrity in the specific areas you discussed in question 10?

12. God has been completely truthful and honest with us. He is ultimate integrity. We can trust him totally and completely. Because of this, Jesus is the kinsman-redeemer that will not fail us. How does Numbers 23:19 relate to this? Why is this an encouragement to us?

13. What do the following Bible verses show us about integrity?

a. Psalm 25:21

b. Proverbs 10:9; 11:3

c. Titus 2:7

d. Proverbs 29:10

e. 1 Chronicles 29:17

REFLECT

Ruth showed her integrity and moral character by being loyal to Naomi, by breaking from her former land and customs, and by working hard in the field. Boaz showed integrity by holding to high moral standards, by his honesty, and by following through on his commitments. As Christians, it will not always be easy to be completely honest in our dealings. Often the world we live in condones dishonesty.

In what areas are you having trouble being a person of integrity? With God's help and guidance, what specific actions can you take this week in that area to safeguard or reinstate your integrity.

LESSON 6

THE RESTORATION OF JOY

RUTH 4:13-22

OPENER

What do you remember as the most joyous occasion or time in your life?

INTRODUCTION

Boaz has married Ruth, and in this last section, we celebrate Naomi's fulfillment and the coming of Jesus. Despite the hardship and disappointment, joy was restored to the people in the story of Ruth. We can also have our joy restored as we receive the blessing of Jesus. Our Kinsman-Redeemer came to this earth in order to buy us back, forgive our sins, and give us new life and restored joy.

1. Compare the introduction of Ruth (Ruth 1:1-5) with the conclusion (Ruth 4:13-17). How does verse 13 show again God's sovereign control in the lives of ordinary people? How have circumstances changed for Naomi?

2. Many times our circumstances don't change, or they take a long time to change. How can joy be restored when circumstances remain difficult?

3. Paul says, "in all our troubles my joy knows no bounds" (2 Corinthians 7:4). How can we have joy in times of disappointment and trouble?

a. John 15:11

b. John 16:20-22

c. 2 Corinthians 8:1-5

d. James 1:2-4

4. What does James mean when he says, "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds" (James 1:2)?

5. Describe a person you know who is joyful in the midst of difficult circumstances. What makes them joyful?

6. Ruth is a foreigner in the line of David into which Jesus was born. There are several unlikely people in this genealogy. Boaz's father was Salmon who married Rahab, the prostitute. Perez was the son of Judah and his daughter-in-law. How does the birth of Jesus restore joy to these individuals?

7. How is Jesus described in Luke 1:14 and Luke 2:10?

8. In what ways is he the source of our joy? (See John 17:13, Acts 2:28, and Psalm 43:4.)

9. David asked God to "restore to me the joy of your salvation" (Psalm 51:12). What is the joy of salvation? How should this joy affect Christians?

10. According to the following Scripture passages, why should we be joyful? What gives us joy?

a. Psalm 19:8, Psalm 119:111

b. Psalm 21:6

c. 1 Peter 1:8

d. 2 John 1:4

e. Psalm 92:4

11. In what ways has God “renewed your life and sustained you” (v. 15)? How does this relate to joy?

12. We are commanded in 1 Thessalonians 5:16 to be joyful always. Sometimes that is difficult to do. When will our joy be totally complete? How will we have ultimate joy? (See John 16:20-22, Jude 1:24, Hebrews 12:2.)

REFLECT

Disappointments faded as Naomi's joy was restored through the selfless love of Ruth and Boaz. Through this same family tree, the Lord brought Israel from unrest to rest through David. The ultimate end of this genealogy is Jesus Christ. He is the restoration of our joy. If we will give Jesus our disappointment, he can and will restore our joy. Circumstances may not change, but as our kinsman-redeemer, Christ has bought us. He has saved us, and he will continue to love and care for us, even through the disappointments of life.

What disappointment or difficulty are you facing today? How can Jesus restore your joy in the midst of these circumstances? What will it take for you to live a joyful life? Take steps this week to let God start that work in your life.

NOTES FOR LEADERS

LESSON 1

2. In ancient days women had virtually no way of earning a living. They could not inherit property, and without a husband or family, they were sure to become dependent upon the charity of others.

10. Ruth was going into a culture that was hostile to her. Moabites were despised in Israel. Although the book of Ruth is set in a temporary time of peace between the two nations (Judges 3:12-30), the two countries were bitter enemies.

For further information on the relationship between Moab and Israel, see Genesis 19:30-38, Numbers 25:1-4, 2 Kings 13:20-21, and Amos 2:1-3.

13. You may want to bring into the discussion examples of how New Testament characters dealt with disappointments as well. Paul was beaten and imprisoned several times, yet he wrote the book of Philippians, "Rejoice in the Lord always" (Philippians 4:4). He also said in 2 Corinthians 4:8-9, "We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair, persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed."

LESSON 2

4. Reaping was done with wooden sickles which had sharpened pieces of flint embedded in them to form a blade. Binders followed the reapers and tied the stalks of grain into sheaves. Gleaners then could gather any missed stalks for their own use.

5. Ruth and Naomi's arrival coincided with the beginning of the spring grain harvest, a seven week period lasting from mid-April to mid-June.

7. Harvesting was difficult work and demanded long hours. Stooping for occasional stalks over and over in the hot sun all day was backbreaking labor. The harvesters did not always treat undefended women well. A Moabite woman may well have been a certain target for abuse.

13. It may be helpful to stress the fact that we do not always see the rewards of our faithfulness in this lifetime.

LESSON 3

2. The symmetry of the Hebrew short story is beautiful. The book of Ruth starts out with distress (Ruth 1:1 -5). This introduction section is exactly 71 words in Hebrew. The story ends with hope and relief (Ruth 4:13-17). This conclusion section is also 71 words long in Hebrew. The crucial turning point is sandwiched exactly in the middle in Ruth 2:20.

4. The chief function of the kinsman-redeemer was to redeem the land that had been sold by a brother in distress; but he also had other roles. He could ransom a kinsman who had sold himself into slavery, and he could act as a go-between when a relative wished to make restitution. Jesus accomplished all of these roles as our ultimate kinsman-redeemer. He has redeemed us from our sin, freed us from the slavery of the devil, and pleaded our case before God.

5. Mara is a Hebrew word that means bitter.

7. Other key Scripture verses that show Jesus as our redeemer are: Romans 3:24; Galatians 3:13; Ephesians 1:7; 1 Corinthians 1:30; 1 Peter 1:18-19; and 1 Timothy 2:6.

11. When talking about God's blessings, it is important to note that God is not obligated to bless us. Many leaders send Christians into despair by saying that if they are really following God, they will be blessed with money, health, and success. God never promises ease to believers.

LESSON 4

3. God provided, through Naomi's plan, a means of existence for Ruth and Naomi. If Ruth had ignored Naomi's advice, most likely they would have been dependent on others. Because she obeyed, she found a husband, a home, had a son, was able to provide for Naomi, and became the ancestor of Jesus.

6. In our culture, Ruth's actions look sexually suggestive; however, it is important to understand the culture of the time and not impose our own culture on the text.

8. Our culture and society today are full of sexual innuendos and temptations. We cannot stay pure by our own will-power. We need the power of the Holy Spirit. The Scripture in the next questions tells us how we can have help in tempting situations.

LESSON 5

4. Boaz was a kinsman of Naomi's but he was not the closest kinsman. Instead of deceitfully scheming a way to get around the law to get what he wanted, he went to the closer kin and dealt with it up front. He risked losing what he wanted to get because he was a man of integrity.

7. The first son that Ruth bore would have her late husband's name and would inherit the property. Thus, the kinsman-redeemer gains nothing for himself. He might even lose his own property if he does not have any other sons to inherit it.

13. If God is not completely trustworthy, we couldn't trust Jesus for our salvation. Because God is truth, we can believe what he says. We have assurance that we can be saved through the blood of Jesus. "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).

LESSON 6

2. Joy is not necessarily being happy. Joy is deeper than a surface emotion or feeling. It is an attitude of the heart.

6. The genealogy is the highlight of the whole story. It shows the ultimate result of Ruth's and Boaz's godly lives: They became ancestors of Jesus. It shows how God can use anyone, even a widow from a foreign land to further his kingdom. This section is what makes Ruth so important. It shows the lineage of the ultimate kinsman —Jesus. For further study on the lives of the other unlikely people in Jesus' family tree see Joshua 2:1-24 (Rahab) and Genesis 38:1-30 (Perez).

7. In these verses Jesus is described as joy. He is the true source of our joy. He is joy personified.

9. & 11. We can be joyful for the many blessings that God has given us. The fact that he exists and that he has saved us should be the greatest source of our joy. Because of his sacrificial death, we can be made clean, new, and righteous before God. This is the greatest joy that any human being can ever know.



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