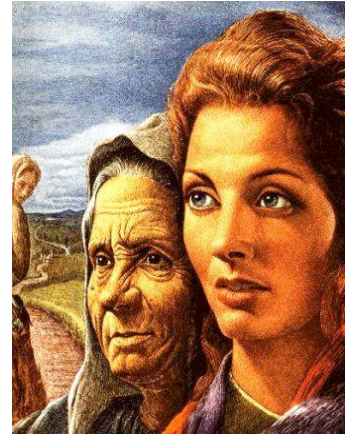


# RUTH

## Message:

Ruth reveals how God supernaturally works out His own purposes through His faithful human instruments, Naomi, Ruth and Boaz. His purposes include *a ruler, a rest, and a redeemer*. He brings these purposes to reality supernaturally, sovereignly, and providentially. As always, God uses people who trust in Him and commit themselves to Him to accomplish His covenant purposes for the Nation of Israel in spite of the gross spiritual and moral failures of the people of this period of the Judges.



## Title

The Book of Ruth is named after the principal character of the book, Ruth, the Moabite.<sup>1</sup> The title is the same in the Hebrew (רוּת), Greek (Septuagint), Latin (Vulgate), and modern language versions. The name Ruth may have been of Moabite origin, and not Hebrew, though its etymological derivation is uncertain.<sup>2</sup> Ruth is one of only two books in the Bible named after a woman, the other being Esther. “After Ruth entered Israel, and especially after the Book of Ruth circulated, the name became popular among the Jews and, later, Christians.”<sup>3</sup>

## Author

While the Book of Ruth is considered by many as an anonymous composition that does not offer even the slightest hint, directly or indirectly, of the identity of the author,<sup>4</sup> Jewish tradition ascribes the work to Samuel. “The attachment of the Book of Ruth to the Book of Judges in the twenty-two book arrangement of the Hebrew Bible implies common authorship or compilation of the two books, a view supported by the Babylonian Talmud (*Baba Bathra* 14b) as well.<sup>5</sup> Unger believes that Ruth was probably written by someone other than Samuel during David’s reign and prior to Solomon’s.<sup>6</sup> However, Merrill, who posits the traditional Jewish view that Samuel was the author, points out that:

The only section whose originality to the book is questionable is the concluding genealogy (4:18-22). However, the reference to David’s ancestry in 4:11-

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<sup>1</sup>Ruth is only one of six historical books in the Old Testament that are named after the books principal character; the others are Joshua, Nehemiah, Esther, Samuel, and Ezra.

<sup>2</sup>Robert L. Hubbard suggests that “the name ‘Ruth’ may derive from the Hebrew *rwh* meaning ‘to soak, irrigate, refresh’” (*The Book of Ruth*, 94).

<sup>3</sup>Thomas Constable, “Ruth” (unpublished class notes in course # 309 “Ruth, Psalms, and Selected Epistles,” Dallas Theological Seminary, Fall 1995), 1.

<sup>4</sup>See for example Frederic W. Bush, *Ruth/Esther*, Word Books, 9:17-18.

<sup>5</sup>Gene Merrill, “Ruth,” in *Old Testament Explorer*, 197.

<sup>6</sup>Merrill F. Unger, *Introductory Guide to the Old Testament*, 384-85.

12, 17 clearly paves the way for the genealogy, which is necessary if the blessing of the elders is to have its intended fulfillment.<sup>7</sup>

### Date of Composition

Most conservative scholars place the date of the writing of Ruth in the monarchy, either in the time of David or Solomon. Merrill, who favors the traditional date writes:

The latest dateable event in the book is the birth of David, which occurred in 1041 B.C. (2 Sam. 5:4; see also 1 Kings 6:1). David's significance was not in his birth, however, but in his selection by the Lord to be king, a selection ratified by Samuel about 1025 B.C. Therefore, a date of 1020 or so for the book's final form is quite reasonable and even compatible with authorship by Samuel (see 1 Sam. 25:1).<sup>8</sup>

Edward Young, who also favored the traditional date of composition, points out that the absence of Solomon's name in the genealogy (4:22) suggests that the book was written sometime during the reign of David (1011-971 B.C.), since a later writer would surely have extended the genealogy to include Solomon.<sup>9</sup> Others, like Unger, feel that the Book of Ruth was put into its final form after David became king in Hebron in 1011 B.C. A careful review of the evidence argues for an earlier, rather than a later date of composition, which aligns well with Samuel. Therefore, the book was probably written by Samuel during the early reign of King David (1011-1000 B.C.), but before the selection and/or enthronement of his son Solomon (971 B.C.).

### Historical Background

According to 1:1, the historical context in which the events recorded in Ruth took place was during the dark and turbulent days when the judges governed Israel—"a period characterized by extreme moral and spiritual decay (ca. 1380–1051 B.C.)."<sup>10</sup> Since Ruth was the great-grandmother of David, who began his rule in Hebron in 1011 B.C., the events in the Book of Ruth occurred in the last half of the 12<sup>th</sup> century. This means that Ruth may have been a contemporary of Gideon.<sup>11</sup>

*Place in the Canon.* In the Hebrew Bible, the Book of Ruth is placed among the five-fold group of books known as the *Megilloth* (Song of Solomon, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, and Esther). The *Megilloth* are placed in the third division of the threefold

<sup>7</sup>Gene Merrill, "Ruth," 197.

<sup>8</sup>Gene Merrill, "Ruth," 198.

<sup>9</sup>*Introduction to the Old Testament*, 358.

<sup>10</sup>"Ruth," in *The Nelson Study Bible: NKJV*, (Nelson 1997), 441.

<sup>11</sup>Some scholars date Ruth contemporary with Gideon (e.g., C. F. Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament: Joshua, Judges, Ruth*, 466) because of Judges 6:3-4, which refers to a lack of food during Gideon's judgeship. Wood also dates Boaz and Ruth's lives to the time of Gideon's judgeship or about 1140 B.C. (Leon Wood, *Distressing Days of the Judges*, 254).

Hebrew canon known as the “Writings” (*Kethuvim*). In our English Bibles, the Book of Ruth follows after Judges, in order to follow the chronological arrangement of the books.

*Audience.* If, as has been suggested, Ruth was written by Samuel, then it was written to the United Nation of Israel to endorse David as God’s chosen king for Israel after Saul.

### Theological Purposes

Many feel that the “key theological idea of Ruth is that the sovereign God who designs to rule through human institutions—specifically through the Davidic dynasty over Israel—is universal in His ultimate intentions.”<sup>12</sup> Merrill states in this regard,

Nothing could be more ironic than the fact that the great-grandmother of King David was a pagan, indeed, a detested Moabite (Deut. 23:3-6; see also Gen. 19:30-38). Such grace paved the way for David’s great Son, Jesus Christ, to become not just King, but also Savior of all those who would embrace Him as such (Matt. 1:6-16; John 3:16).<sup>13</sup>

Other suggested purposes would include: *Genealogically*, the book provides an account of the ancestry of David, which is very important seeing as how it is not included in 1 and 2 Samuel. Therefore 4:18-22 becomes the climax, rather than merely an appended afterthought to the story; *Historically*, Tom Constable points out that:

The book ties the patriarchal period to the monarchical period of Israel’s history. It does not just go back to the period of the judges or to the Mosaic era but all the way back to Perez the patriarch (4:18-22). This shows that the Davidic dynasty was a fulfillment of the promises of the Abrahamic Covenant. It did not rest on the conditional Mosaic Covenant.<sup>14</sup>

*Typologically*, Boaz illustrates how the law of the kinsman-redeemer was to function (Lev. 25:25, 47-49). Even though the nearest kinsman in the story refused to redeem, Boaz was delighted to faithfully provide the redemption required by the law (3:12; 4:1-10). In so doing, Boaz provides the only example of the law of the kinsman-redeemer in action, and becomes a wonderful type of the Lord Jesus Christ, Who was both qualified and willing to provide redemption for mankind (John 3:16; Heb. 9:11-14, 28; 10:9-14). As Constable points out, concerning God’s ultimate purpose for graciously providing redemption,

The Book of Ruth reveals God’s grace in providing a Redeemer. He provided Boaz to redeem Ruth and Naomi. Through Ruth He provided David to set Israel free. Through David He provided Jesus Christ to set the world free. God did not have to

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<sup>12</sup>Gene Merrill, “Ruth,” 198. Gray, Haller, Hals, Hertzburg, and Rudolph also support divine providence as the principal emphasis in the book.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 198-99.

<sup>14</sup>“Ruth” (unpublished class notes in course # 309 Ruth, Psalms, and Selected Epistles), 27.

provide redemption. He did it out of the love of His own heart. **That is grace.** Furthermore God did it all. There is nothing that the redeemed person could do to obtain his redemption but trust the person of his redeemer. That too is grace.<sup>15</sup>

*Morally*, the book demonstrates that faith and purity are possible even in a terrible moral environment. Ruth and Boaz’s faith in God resulted in their excellent moral characters (2:1; 3:11). The power of their faith overcame their backgrounds and environments.

## Keys to Ruth

### **Key Word: Kinsman-Redeemer**

**Key Verses (1:16; 3:11)**—“But Ruth said: ‘Entreat me not to leave you, *or to* turn back from following after you; for wherever you go, I will go; and wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people *shall be* my people, and your God, my God” (1:16).

“And now, my daughter, do not fear. I will do for you all that you request, for all the people of my town know that you *are* a virtuous woman” (3:11).

**Key Chapter (4)**—In twenty-two short verses, Ruth moves from widowhood and poverty to marriage and wealth (2:1). In exercising the law regulating the redemption of property (Lev. 25:25–34) and the law of the Kinsman Redeemer—dealing with a brother’s duty to raise up seed (children) in the name of the deceased (Deut. 25:5–10), Boaz brings a Moabite woman into the family line of David and eventually of Jesus Christ.

**Christ in Ruth**—The concept of the Kinsman-Redeemer or *goel* (3:9, “close relative”) is an important portrayal of the work of Christ. The *goel* must: (1) be related by blood to those he redeems (see Deut. 25:5, 7–10; John 1:14; Rom. 1:3; Phil. 2:5–8; Heb. 2:14–15); (2) be able to pay the price of redemption (see 2:1; 1 Pet. 1:18–19); (3) be willing to redeem (see 3:11; Matt. 20:28; John 10:15, 18; Heb. 10:7); and (4) be free himself (Christ was free from the curse of sin). The word *goel*, used thirteen times in this short book, presents a clear picture of the mediating work of Jesus Christ our LORD.

**Contribution to the Bible**—(1) Literary—Ruth is a book of simplicity but profundity. It is one of literature’s best examples of filial love and piety. (2) Historical—Ruth provides a bridge between the judges and the monarchy (its last word is “David”). It illustrates faithfulness amid infidelity. (3) Doctrinal—Ruth teaches that the Gentiles are not outside the scope of redemption. (4) Moral—Ruth communicates high ideals of integrity in relationships and marriage.

Ruth is one of the two biblical books named after a woman, the other is Esther:

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<b>Ruth</b>	<b>Esther</b>
A gentile woman	A Jewish woman
Lived among the Jews	Lived among the Gentiles
Married a Jewish man in the royal line of David	Married a gentile man who ruled an empire
A story of faith and blessing	A story of faith and blessing

The Book of Ruth contrasts with Judges in several notable ways:

<b>RUTH</b>	<b>JUDGES</b>
Fidelity, righteousness, purity	Frightful immorality
Following the True God	Following idols
Devotion	Decline, debasement, disloyalty
Love	Lust
Peace	War
Kindness	Cruelty
Obedient faith leads to blessing	Disobedience leads to discipline
Spiritual light	Spiritual darkness

## Outline

### I. The Family of Elimelech Sojourns in Moab 1:1-22

#### A. The reason for the sojourn: *A famine in the land* 1:1-2

1. The setting: “in the days when the judges governed” 1:1a
2. The situation: 1:1b-5
  - a. There was a famine in the land of Judah 1:1b
  - b. The family of Elimelech went to sojourn in Moab 1:1c-2

#### B. The resulting tragedy in Moab 1:3-5

1. The death of Elimelech, Naomi’s husband 1:3
2. The deaths of Mahlon and Chilion, Naomi’s sons 1:4-5

#### C. The return of Naomi and Ruth to Judah 1:6-22

1. The decision of Naomi to return to her homeland 1:6-7
2. The decision of Ruth to return with Naomi 1:8-18
  - a. Naomi advises Ruth and Orpah to return to their mother’s households 1:8-10
  - b. Ruth and Orpah’s response: “no, we will return with you” 1:11-18
    - 1) Orpah relents and returns to her people 1:11-14

- 2) Ruth refuses to return to her people and returns instead with Naomi 1:15-18
  - a) Ruth accepts Naomi's people as her people 1:15
  - b) Ruth accepts Naomi's God as her God 1:16
  - c) Ruth accepts to die where Naomi dies 1:17-18
3. The disgraceful arrival of Naomi and Ruth in Bethlehem 1:19-22
  - a. The reception by the women of the city 1:19
  - b. The response by Naomi: "call me *Mara* ("bitter") 1:20-21
  - c. The record of the time: "the beginning of barley harvest" (end of April) 1:22

## **II. The Faithfulness of Ruth in Providing for Naomi 2:1-23**

- A. Ruth's plan to obtain food for Naomi 2:1-7
  1. Ruth requests permission from Naomi to glean for food (see Lev 19:9-10) 2:1-2
  2. Ruth receives providential guidance by God to the field of Boaz 2:3
  3. Boaz inquires of his foreman concerning Ruth's identity 2:4-7
- B. Ruth's protection and provision supplied by Boaz 2:8-17
  1. Ruth's protection by Boaz 2:8-13
  2. Ruth's provision by Boaz 2:14-17
  3. Ruth's provision for Naomi: by way of Boaz 2:17-23

## **III. The Faithfulness of Naomi in Securing a Redeemer for Ruth 3:1-18**

- A. Naomi instructs Ruth to ask Boaz to act as her kinsman-redeemer 3:1-5
- B. Ruth requests that Boaz act as her kinsman-redeemer 3:6-9
- C. Ruth is informed of a closer relative than Boaz, but Boaz pledges to act as her kinsman-redeemer if the closer relative refused to do so 3:10-15
- D. Ruth returns to Naomi and tells her all that transpired 3:16-18

## **IV. The Faithfulness of God in Providing Boaz as Ruth's Kinsman-Redeem 4:1-22**

- A. The redemption of Ruth secured by Boaz 4:1-12
  1. The right of redemption offered to the **nearest kinsman (Lev 25:5-10)** 4:1-5
  2. The refusal of the nearest kinsman to redeem 4:6-8
  3. The redemption accomplished by Boaz 4:9-12
- B. The reception of a son for Boaz and Ruth: Obed is the father of Jesse, the father of David 4:13-17

- C. The record of David's genealogy<sup>16</sup> 4:18-22
1. Now these are the generations of Perez 4:18a
  2. Hezron was born to Perez 4:18b
  3. Ram was born to Hezron 4:19a
  4. Amminadab was born to Ram 4:19b
  5. Nahshon was born to Amminadab 4:20a
  6. Salmon was born to Nahshon 4:20b
  7. Boaz was born to Salmon 4:21a
  8. Obed was born to Boaz 4:21b
  9. Jesse was born to Obed 4:22a
  10. David was born to Jesse 4:22b

The outline below has been included because it highlights the literary–chronological sequence of the plot behind the narrative; namely the provision of redemption for Naomi and Ruth by their **kinsman-redeemer** (*goel*) **Boaz (Lev 25:5-10)**.<sup>17</sup>

### **Act 1. Prologue and Problem: Death and Emptiness 1:1-22**

- Scene 1. Setting and Problem. A Judean family dies in Moab: Naomi is left without husband and sons (1:1-6)
- Scene 2. Emptiness Compounded: Naomi and her daughters-in-law on the road to Judah (1:7-19a)
- Scene 3. Emptiness Expressed: Naomi arrives at Bethlehem with Ruth (1:19b-22)

### **Act 2. Ruth Meets Boaz, Naomi's Relative, on the Harvest Field 2:1-23**

- Scene 1. Ruth goes to glean—and happens upon the field of Boaz, Naomi's relative (2:1-3)
- Scene 2. Ruth and Boaz meet on the harvest field: Boaz is exceedingly generous (2:4-17a)
- Scene 3. Naomi evaluates the meeting: Boaz is one of their redeemers (2:17b-23)

### **Act 3. Naomi Sends Ruth to Boaz on the Threshing Floor 3:1-18**

- Scene 1. Naomi reveals her plan for a home and husband for Ruth (3:1-5)
- Scene 2. Ruth carries out Naomi's plan, and Boaz offers to be the redeemer (3:6-15)

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<sup>16</sup>As Morris writes, "A genealogy is a striking way of bringing before us the continuity of God's purpose through the ages" (Leon Morris, *Ruth*, 318).

<sup>17</sup>The above outline is taken from Frederic W. Bush, *Ruth/Esther*, vol. 9 (Waco, TX: Word), 56.

Scene 3. Naomi evaluates the encounter: Boaz will [surely] act (3:16-18)

#### **Act 4. Resolution and Epilogue: Life and Fullness 4:1-22**

Scene 1. Boaz acquires the right to redeem Naomi and Ruth (4:1-12)

Scene 2. A son is born to Ruth and Boaz: Naomi is restored to life and fullness (4:13-17)

Scene 3. Epilogue. A Judean family restored: The line of King David (4:18-22)

#### **Argument**

The story of Ruth, apart from being a beautiful story of love, loyalty, and redemption, provides a crucial link in the ancestry of King David through the salvation of a God-fearing Moabite woman named Ruth. The story of Ruth's redemption begins with the family of Elimelech leaving Bethlehem to Sojourn in Moab because of a Famine in the Land (1:1-22). The events recorded are set "in the days when the judges governed" (1:1). The opening chapter is laced with ironies: Elimelech ("My God is King"), a child of God, leaves his home town of Bethlehem ("House of bread") for Moab (a pagan nation). Although the families move to Moab was intended to preserve life, unfortunately it resulted in tragedy, Naomi lost her husband Elimelech (1:3) and both of her boys, Mahlon and Chilion (1:4-5). Hearing that the famine in Judah had passed, Naomi makes a decision to return home (1:6-22). Naomi advises Ruth and Orpah to return to their mother's households (1:8-10). Orpah relents and returns to her people (1:11-14), but Ruth refuses to return to her people and returns instead with Naomi (1:15-18). Ruth turns away from her idols to follow her mother-in-law by making Naomi's people her people (1:15) and Naomi's God her God (1:16). Naomi and Ruth arrive in Bethlehem in time for "the beginning of barley harvest" (end of April) (1:19-22).

The second episode in the story reveals the Faithfulness of Ruth in Providing for Naomi (2:1-23). After receiving Naomi's permission to glean for food (2:1-2), Ruth receives providential guidance by God to the field of Boaz (2:3). Her reputation as a godly young widow, apparently preceded her to Boaz's field. Boaz inquired of his foreman concerning Ruth's identity (2:4-7), after which he supplied her with protection and provisions (2:8-17), sending plenty of extra grain home with her for Naomi (2:17-23).

The next scene in the story records the Faithfulness of Naomi in Securing a Redeemer for Ruth (3:1-18). Naomi instructs Ruth on how to go about asking Boaz to act as her kinsman-redeemer (3:1-5). According to the custom of the day, Ruth presented herself to Boaz, and requested that he act as her kinsman-redeemer (3:6-9). Boaz informed Ruth of the steps he would have to take in order to redeem her, but pledged to act as her kinsman-redeemer if the closer relative refused to do so (3:10-15). Ruth returns to Naomi with a present of grain from Boaz, and tells her all that transpired (3:16-18).



The fourth scene reveals the Faithfulness of God in Providing Boaz as Ruth's Kinsman-Redeemer (4:1-22). First thing in the morning, Boaz began efforts to secure Ruth's Redemption (4:1-12). The right of redemption was offered to the nearest kinsman (4:1-5) who refused to redeem Ruth, and instead turned his right to redeem over to Boaz (4:6-8). The redemption was then accomplished by Boaz who paid the price of redemption for all of Naomi's property, and daughter-in-law, Ruth (4:9-12). Boaz and Ruth are then married and eventually receive a Son from God who they name Obed (4:13-17.) Obed turns out to be the grandfather of King David and father of Jesse, the father of David (4:17b). The book closes with a record of David's genealogy that traces David's family tree of Judah from Perez, Judah's son down to Boaz and Ruth's son Obed, the father of Jesse, the father of David (4:18-22).

Ruth serves as an illustration of God's faithfulness to bless anyone who will trust in and obey Him as Ruth had. What an amazing contrast with the cursing that He had been forced to bring upon those who "did that which was right in their own eyes" (Jud. 21:25b).

### CHART OF RUTH

Focus	Ruth's Love Demonstrated		Ruth's Love Rewarded	
	1:1	2:23	3:1	4:22
Divisions	Ruth's Decision To Remain With Naomi	Ruth's Devotion To Care For Naomi	Ruth's Request For Redemption By Boaz	Ruth's Reward Redemption By Boaz
	1:1      1:18	1:19      2:23	3:1      3:18	4:1      4:22
Topics	Ruth and Naomi		Ruth and Boaz	
	Death of Family	Ruth Cares for Naomi	Boaz Cares for Ruth	Birth of Family
Place	Moab (ten years)	Fields in Bethlehem (months)	Threshing Floor in Bethlehem (one day)	Bethlehem (one year)
Time	c. 30 years			