



## Introduction to the Book of Ruth Ruth 1

### Introduction

After the grim closing chapters of Judges it is a relief to encounter the lovely little book of Ruth. Set in the time of Judges, it is an example of how different life can be for those who love God. God's people may have trials and afflictions the same as, or even worse than, others, however the result is quite different. The foreordained purpose bears fruit which is eternal. Moreover, believers going through deep waters have God's promises, purpose, and presence to sustain them.

Ruth was one of the favorite books of Dr. J. Vernon Magee, former pastor of Church of the Open Door in Los Angeles California and founder of Thru the Bible Radio Network. He called Ruth the "Romance of Redemption" because it is a romance and a story of redemption.

According to Keil and Delitsch, "The book contains an historical picture from the family life of the ancestors of David, intended to show how the ancestors of this great king walked uprightly before God and man in piety and singleness of heart, and in modesty and purity of life" (Commentary on The Old Testament). It is encouraging to know that in impure times pure lives are possible.

Pieter A Verhoef says, "The Book of Ruth is honored on all sides as a literary work of art" (The Biblical Expositor, Vol. 1, Carl Henry, ed). Ruth, therefore, is reliable history as well as great literature.

### Author of the Book of Ruth

The writer of Ruth is unknown. Samuel (Israel's last judge) may have written it to bolster David's right to the throne, just as Matthew wrote to present Jesus as the Messiah and heir to the royal line of David (Matthew 1). There is no reason that Ruth could not have written it looking back as David's great-grandmother. One thing is sure: the Author is the Holy Spirit breathing through some human writer. See also 2 Timothy 3:16.

### Place of Ruth in The Scripture

The Book of Ruth is placed between the lawlessness and strife of Judges and the wars and upheavals in Samuel. Ruth is a story of love and marriage, work and home, and of Jewish customs and simple faith in God. It is a bright star shining in a dark night. There is no intrigue or violence. But there is the continuity of the line of Judah and the promised Messiah. In the Book of Ruth, we meet David's immediate ancestors.

### Significance of the Book of Ruth

Ruth and Esther are the only books of the Bible named for women. Ruth ends with the genealogy which connects Perez, Judah's son in Genesis, to David, Jesse's son in 1 Samuel. Ruth, the Moabite woman, was placed by God into the line of Christ. She is one of five women mentioned in the genealogy of Jesus Christ in Matthew Chapter 1. We would not know who she was or why she was there without the book of Ruth. The other women mentioned in Matthew are Tamar, Rahab, and Bathsheba, all Gentiles.

Another important thing we learn from the Book of Ruth is the role of the kinsman redeemer, which will be studied later. How else would we understand the role of our great Kinsman Redeemer, Jesus Christ, if it were not for Boaz' actions which foreshadow Him?

### Outlines of the Book of Ruth

Verhoef's outline of the whole book gives a helpful overview.

- Grievous Visitations - Ruth 1:1-5
- Far-Reaching Decisions - Ruth 1:6-22
- A Surprising Encounter - Ruth 2:1-23
- Wholehearted Dedication - Ruth 3:1-18
- Significant Genealogy - Ruth 4:18-22

Dr. Magee's outline of the book is very simple.

- I. In the Land of Moab, Chapter 1
  - II. In the Field of Boaz, Chapter 2
  - III. On the Threshing Floor of Boaz, Chapter 3
  - IV. In the Heart and Home of Boaz, Chapter 4
- (Briefing the Bible, J. Vernon Magee).

### Outline of Ruth Chapter 1

- I. Background in Moab- Ruth 1:1-18
- II. Back in Bethlehem - Ruth 1:19-22

### I. Background in Moab- Ruth 1:1-18

- A. Naomi's Family - Ruth 1:1-5

- 1. Famine, the cause of migration - 1:1

A famine in the land during Judges prompted Elimelech, who lived in Judah, to take his wife and two sons east across the Jordan River to the land of Moab. Famines accompany drought because when there is no water there are no crops.

## 2. Bethlehem home - 1:1

Elimelech left his home in Bethlehem, which means “house of bread”. This is the same Bethlehem in Judah which is mentioned in the closing chapters of Judges as the home of the Levite. He also left, perhaps on account of the famine, only he journeyed to the west. This “house of bread” would one day be the birthplace of the Bread of Life.

## 3. Names - 1:2-3

Elimelech means “My God is King”. This is interesting since he was of Judah, the tribe from which the kings would come. Elimelech died soon after reaching Moab. After this, his wife, Naomi lived with her two sons, Mahlon and Chilion, whose names mean “sickly” and “wasting” respectively. This is almost prophetic.

## 4. Moabite wives - 1:4-5

Naomi’s sons married local Moabite women, Orpah and Ruth. After ten years the sons also died, whether from the effects of the famine or a disease in their new environment or some other reason. Had the family found the better life they sought?

## B. Naomi’s Daughters-in-Law - 1:6-18

## 1. Orpah’s decision to stay - 1:6-14

Hearing the famine was over at home, Naomi had no reason to stay in Moab. *The Lord had visited His people by giving them bread.* She decided to return home. Naomi had the love and respect of her daughters-in-law who both wanted to go with her. The two young widows set out with her for Israel. However, Naomi knew that they would be shunned in Israel. It would be better for them to remain at home where they would have a chance to remarry. She logically and practically drew the scenario that even if she remarried, became pregnant and had sons, the young daughters-in-law would hardly wait for them to grow up to marry them. Orpah got the point, they wept, kissed, and parted. The Bible gives no criticism of Orpah.

Naomi's reasoning in verses 12-13 is possibly drawn from the Jewish idea of levirate marriage described in Deuteronomy 25:5-6 in which a man was obligated to marry his brother's widow. *If brothers dwell together, and one of them dies and has no son, the widow of the dead man shall not be married to a stranger outside the family; her husband's brother shall go in to her, take her as his wife, and perform the duty of a husband's brother to her.* The point of this was to give the dead man an heir. The firstborn son would take the name of the deceased man (*that his name may not be blotted out in Israel*).

Naomi's intention was to discourage the young women by making it clear that if they went with her, they stood no chance of remarriage and children. She had no more sons to offer and likely never would. Furthermore, even if she did, it would be pointless, even ridiculous, for her daughters-in-law to wait for them to grow up.

## 2. Ruth’s decision to go - 1:14-18

Naomi tried to reason with Ruth. She too could go back as Orpah had done, to her people and her gods. Moab was an idolatrous nation, which may have bothered Naomi the entire time she was there. Ruth weighed the matter and considered the consequences. The Scriptures record that *Ruth clung to her* (Naomi). Ruth's answer to her mother-in-law is intensely moving. Let us look at it in detail.

- a. *Entreat me not to leave you or to turn back from following after you*
- b. *For wherever you go I will go; and wherever you lodge I will lodge*
- c. *Your people shall be my people*
- d. *And your God, my God*
- e. *Where you die, I will die, and there will I be buried*

First, Ruth told Naomi to stop trying to dissuade her. Her mind was made up. She was going (a. and b.). Secondly, Ruth adopted Naomi’s Hebrew people as her own (c.). She had already had a Hebrew husband. Third, and most important, Ruth took Naomi’s God for her God (d.). Lastly, she vowed to stay and be buried in her new land even after Naomi’s death (e.). This was a lifetime commitment.

The character of each woman glows. Naomi herself drew the love of both her daughters-in-law. But it was Naomi’s God that transformed Ruth’s life so that she rejected the gods of her culture and chose the God of Israel as she had come to know Him through Naomi. Is this true of you? Is God attracting others through you as He did through Naomi? Are you responding to Him by making a complete break with your culture and background, and choosing to worship only Him today?

**II. Back in Bethlehem - Ruth 1:19-22**

*Now the two of them went until they came to Bethlehem.*

## A. A Sorrowful Return – Ruth 1:19-21

The city was buzzing at Naomi’s return. Where was her

family? Who was the young Moabite woman with her? Naomi gave release to her grief. *Do not call me Naomi, call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, and the Lord has brought me back home again empty. Why do you call me Naomi, since the Lord has testified against me, and the Almighty has afflicted me?* She mentioned God four times, using two names for Him. The Almighty translates “El Shaddai”, the overshadowing or all-sufficient God. “The LORD” (notice that your Bible uses all capital letters) is used in this manner in Scripture to represent Israel's covenant name for God, YHWH. It was Jewish tradition never to pronounce this name, which is also referred to as the Tetragrammaton. Sometimes it is rendered as Jehovah or Yahweh.

Naomi means “pleasant” and Mara means “bitter”. Perhaps Naomi felt afflicted and under God’s judgment for ever leaving Judah. She had only Ruth to show for her years in Moab.

#### B. A Moabite Refugee – Ruth 1:22

As she walked through the streets of Bethlehem, Ruth probably drew very curious glances. Moabites were distant and disfavored relatives and were excluded from the congregation of the Lord (Deuteronomy 23:3-6; Nehemiah 13:1-3). The Moabites were descended from Abraham’s nephew, Lot, who had chosen to live in the wicked yet wealthy city of Sodom. The Moabites and the Ammonites resulted from incest between Lot and his two daughters after their narrow escape from the

destruction of that city. The eldest daughter named her son Moab and the younger called hers Ben-Ammi. He became the father of the people of Ammon (Genesis 19:36-38). Both peoples settled across the Jordan. They had both refused to help the Israelites on their journey from Egypt to the Promised Land. Instead, Moabite women seduced the Israelites and introduced their strange gods to them (Numbers 25:1-4).

Ruth is a trophy to God’s grace! She was an outsider who was accepted by Him as a worshipper of the true God. We are accepted on the same basis of grace when we choose Jesus Christ as our Lord and King.

It was barley harvest time and God’s grace was about to be shown, both in an abundant harvest after a time of famine, and in blessing upon the afflicted Naomi and the faithful widow, Ruth.

#### Applications

1. Are you in a time of spiritual famine? Will you go to God’s breadbasket, His word, and feast there until you are satisfied? God’s word is your spiritual nutrition as it was for Jeremiah. *Your words were found and I ate them and Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart* (Jeremiah 15:16). See also Isaiah 55:1-2, 10-11.
2. Will you choose to be with God’s people by faithfully attending church, getting to know some who seem to know God in a special way, and committing your life to being one of His?

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## QUESTIONS

Questions are based on the New King James Version of the Bible.

### DAY ONE: Read all notes and references.

1. ? (Thought Question) What did you find in Ruth chapter 1 which illustrates the key theme of Judges that everyone did what was right in his own eyes?
2. List as many points as you can remember from Ruth's vow to Naomi.

### DAY TWO: Read Ruth 2:1-4.

3. From verse 1, what do you learn about Boaz??
4. a. What did Ruth ask Naomi's permission to do?  
  
b. What does "glean" mean? You may look it up in a dictionary or Bible dictionary if you have one.  
  
c. From Leviticus 23:22 and Deuteronomy 24:19-22, how was Ruth's request connected with God's command?
5. Whose field did Ruth happen to come to?
6. a. What greeting took place between Boaz and his reapers?  
  
b. What do these greeting tell you about:  
Boaz?  
  
His reapers?

### DAY THREE: Read Ruth 2:5-12.

7. a. What was Boaz curious to know?  
  
b. What information did he learn from his servant?
8. What invitation and information did Boaz give Ruth? Circle "T" for true or "F" for false and give the verse where it is found.
  - a. T or F vs. \_\_\_\_\_ Glean in my field and stay close to my young women.
  - b. T or F vs. \_\_\_\_\_ Join me for dinner this evening.
  - c. T or F vs. \_\_\_\_\_ I have commanded the young men not to touch you.
  - d. T or F vs. \_\_\_\_\_ I am the richest man in Bethlehem.
  - e. T or F vs. \_\_\_\_\_ When you are thirsty, go and drink.
9. a. How did Ruth respond to Boaz?  
  
b. Why was she surprised by Boaz kindness? Give verse.
10. What did Boaz already know about Ruth? Fill in the blanks.

- a. All that she had done for \_\_\_\_\_.
  - b. She had left her \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ and the \_\_\_\_\_.
  - c. She had come to a \_\_\_\_\_ whom she \_\_\_\_\_.
11. a. What blessing did Boaz give Ruth?
- b. What did Ruth appreciate about the blessing? Give two points.

**DAY FOUR: Read Ruth 2:4-18.**

12. a. Where did Ruth eat lunch? Be specific.
- b. What special attention did Boaz show to her?
13. What instructions did Boaz give his young men about:
- a. Where Ruth could glean?
  - b. How they were to treat Ruth?
  - c. Special treatment for Ruth?
14. a. How long did Ruth work that day?
- b. What did Ruth take home to her mother-in-law? Be as specific as possible.

**DAY FIVE: Read Ruth 2:19-23.**

15. a. What did Naomi want to know?
- b. What was Naomi's response when she heard the answer?
- c. What new information did she give Ruth about Boaz?
16. a. What further information did Ruth give to Naomi?
- b. How did Naomi respond to this?
- c. How did Ruth show respect and love for her mother-in-law?

**Senior Review Question**

What positive character traits do you see in:  
Boaz?

Ruth?