

NOON HOUR BIBLE CLASS  
Spring Semester 2007  
**BOOK OF RUTH**

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## RUTH INTRODUCTION

### I. Background

Ruth is one of the most poignant books of the Bible. At times it is heartbreaking, at others, intense and penetrating because it cuts to the heart of our common human experience. Here we meet Naomi, a Jewish wife and mother, who in a short time loses her husband and two sons in death. Life has dealt her a bitter blow and she challenges the goodness of God. The book begins with the sorrow, grief, and bitterness of Naomi and ends with her blessing. One of the major doctrine of this book focuses on how God transforms suffering into blessing, and sorrow into joy. Another closely associated doctrinal theme is God's covenant faithfulness to individuals and to the nation of Israel. God will demonstrate His great character by preserving Israel's royal lineage through a period of national apostasy, failure, subjugation, and disaster.

Set in the dark days of the Judges, a time of Israel's greatest apostasy and rebellion against God, we see in Ruth that even in the midst of the rank paganism that is influencing the nation at that time, even during the midst of the violence that is taking place, there is light; there is hope (Jud 17:6; 21:25). The message of Ruth to us is that even in the darkest days of our own lives, no matter how horrible things may seem, no matter how tragic the circumstances appear, no matter how overwhelming, there is always hope. If we are alive, God has a plan for our lives. Until we die, it is never too late. Even during Israel's rejection of God during the days of the Judges, God has not forgotten His people. Even in the dark days of their apostasy, God is working to bring about the solution to their unfaithfulness and give them blessing. Ruth is the book of hope, because the Book of Ruth ends with the foreshadowing of Ruth's great grandson who is David. He is a type of Christ who will bring to Israel their greatest period of prosperity and blessing. Ruth is a book about grace and how God transforms suffering and cursing into blessing.

Background verses: Ex 23:20-26; Lev 26:1-20; Deut 7:1-11; 28:1ff (specifically v. 23); Josh 24:14ff; Jud 2:1-5, 11-19; 17:6; 21:25.

### II. Authorship

A. The Author of Ruth is not identified by the text. And more so than almost any other book of the Bible, the verses of the text offer no hint of interest in the identity of the author.

- B. Jewish tradition attributes the work to Samuel (to validate his lineage at his anointing), but this is unlikely since David appears in Ruth 4:17, 22, and Samuel died prior to David's coronation as king (1010 BC).
- C. Some Jewish rabbis have ascribed the writing to Naomi, but she also died before David was enthroned.
- D. The writer's death before David's rise to the throne would not be a problem if the author was presenting prophecy. However, the genealogy in the final chapter is more a report of historical events rather than a prediction of future events.
- E. The references to David appear to be an integral part of the original book and not a later addition. So Ruth was probably not written by either Samuel or Naomi.
- F. The composition of the book possibly dates to the early kingdom period. That David's son Solomon is not mentioned in the genealogy may indicate that the book was written during David's reign as king. But Solomon does not need to be mentioned to merely refer to the royal line. (An argument from silence is not strong.)
- G. If the book was written within a few generations of the events described, possibly the best and most recent theory is that Nathan is the author.
- H. However, some OT scholars believe the authorship of the book can be dated as late as the reign of Josiah (609-540 BC).
- I. In the end, we can only speculate about who might have written the book of Ruth, but the anonymity of the work should not detract from its profound spiritual value, literary beauty, and authenticity in the Canon of Scripture.

### III. Title

- A. The biblical Book of Ruth derives its name from one of its three main characters, the Moabite daughter-in-law of Naomi and eventual wife of Boaz. The traditional derivation of the name from the Hebrew word for "friendship" is tempting, but wishful thinking. The accurate etymology of the name remains a mystery. The mystery of the name also delivers the fascination of Ruth and what God does in her life. From nothing, the unknown, comes the grace of God and His glory is again revealed.
- B. Ruth is named twelve times in the book, but elsewhere in the Bible only in Matthew's genealogy of Jesus in Matt 1:5.
- C. The name of the book after Ruth is truly remarkable for several reasons.
  - 1. Ruth was not an Israelite. She was a Moabite, a fact emphasized by the writer and by Boaz five times. This is the only book in the OT canon named after a non Israelite. (The Moabites spring from the bizarre incident after the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah in Gen 19:30-38, when Lot's daughters have incestuous relations with him. The son of the older daughter was Moab. The Moabites are distant cousins of the Hebrews, but pagans, outside the Land.)

2. From a literary standpoint, Ruth is not the main character of the book.
- D. The story opens by describing the crisis in Naomi's family, highlighting her own emptiness, and concludes with the resolution of the crisis and the declaration of her fullness in the birth of Obed. In the conclusion (4:13-22), the writer all but ignores Ruth. Based on the plot, the story could have been just as easily named after Naomi.
- E. The importance of dialog is significant in this book. More than fifty-two percent of the narrative is direct speech or discourse. Of the three main actors in the drama, however, Ruth speaks least often, and her remarks are the shortest. Ruth speaks a total of 120 words in ten dialogues. Naomi speaks 225 words in twelve discourses. Boaz speaks 281 words in fourteen exchanges. Based on dialogue, the book could be named after Boaz.
- F. Ruth could be seen as the link between the other characters, but Naomi is also a vital link about which the entire story revolves.
- G. No doubt the title of Ruth reflects the writer's and reader's fascination with and special admiration for the character of Ruth.
- H. The English title of Ruth comes from the Septuagint version of the book. The Hebrews did not give formal titles to books, but identified each work from the first line of the original text, "in the days when Judges Judged."

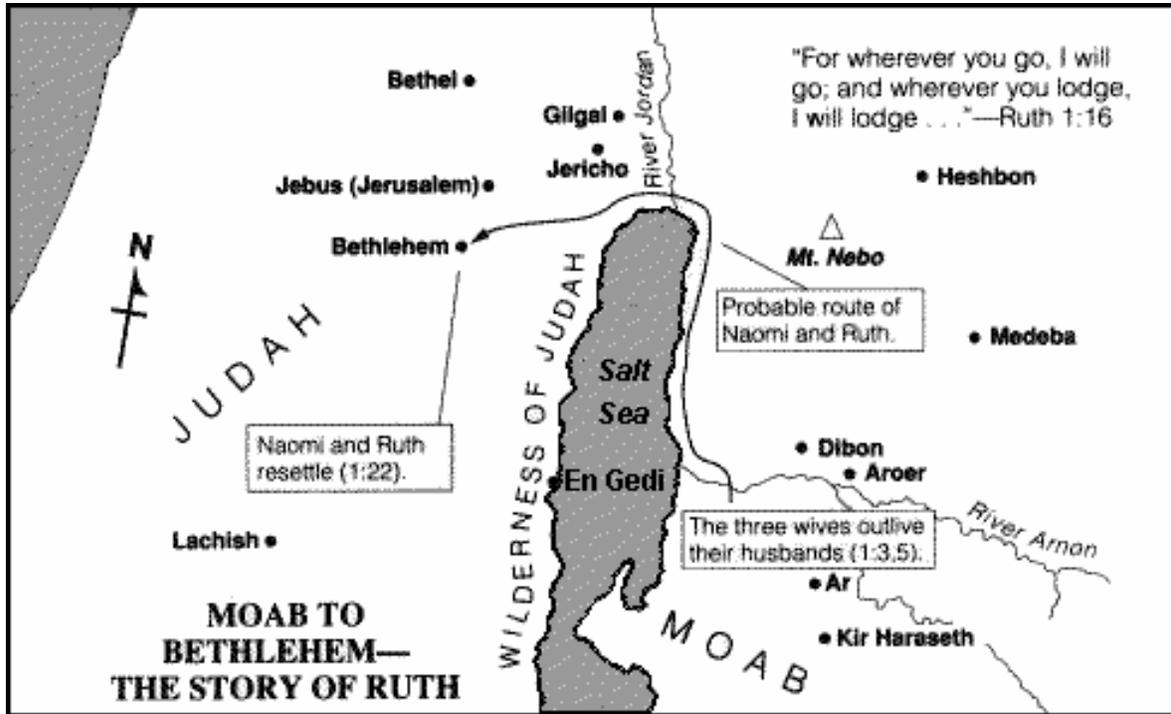
#### IV. Place in the Canon and Date

- A. Even though the author is unknown, the canonical placement of the Book of Ruth seems to have been recognized from the beginning. We only have a very slight indication that Ruth's inclusion in the canon and inspiration was challenged. This might be explained by the early belief that Samuel or Nathan was the author.
- B. The placement of the Book of Ruth after Judges in our English Bibles follows the arrangement of the Septuagint (Greek translation of the Hebrew text, 280 BC). This alignment suggests Ruth was originally attached to Judges.
- C. Ruth's association with Judges offers the reader welcome relief from the decay and failure of the time of Judges. Whereas Judges had developed the theme of Israel's increasing spiritual decline and infidelity, this book highlights the presence and nature of genuine spirituality during the same period. In contrast to Canaanized or flawed characters like Gideon, Jephthah, and Samson, all of the personalities in Ruth display authentic faith and true covenant faithfulness (*hesed*). The Book of Ruth demonstrates that the lights of God's grace and human integrity still shone in some small communities in Israel with Bethlehem our example in Ruth.
- D. On the other hand, the vast majority of Hebrew manuscripts place Ruth with Song of Songs, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, and Esther, part of a group known as the writings (*Kethuvim*).

- E. The Book of Ruth was one of five books traditionally read at annual Jewish festivals. Ruth was read at the Feast of Weeks (Pentecost), fifty days after Passover, commemorating the Firstfruits of the harvest (Ex 23:16). Ruth's betrothal took place during this festive harvest season, when barley was being winnowed (Ruth 1:22; 3:2).
  - F. The books in the writings articulate wisdom, either in a formal way as the artistic products of wisdom or the truth of what is taught. Ruth is found in the writings because of
    - 1. the literary form and skill of the writer, but more so,
    - 2. because this short-story informs us of how we can live wisely in the midst of undeserved suffering by applying biblical doctrines/truth to suffering in our own lives. In this way we see suffering turned to blessing when we go through those times of trials and heartache. We see from the example of Naomi and Ruth how God can take suffering and turn it into blessing.
  - G. The placement of the Book of Ruth following Judges in our English Bibles works the best for us because it maintains historical unity with Judges and contributes additional positive insight into Jewish life at that time.
- V. Date and Historical Setting
- A. The date of the writing of the Book of Ruth is also troublesome. Without certain knowledge of the author, the specific year or decade is very elusive. Liberal scholars of the past century tend to date the book after the Jews return from the exile (536-444 BC). However, the arguments in support of this position are weak and unconvincing. (Exile: Northern Kingdom, 722 BC, Southern Kingdom, 600-586 BC; Post Exile: Zerubbabel, 536 BC, Ezra, 458 BC, Nehemiah, 444 BC.)
  - B. Characteristics of the Hebrew language in the book seem to be from the time prior to the exile. Some date the book within a few generations of the events described in the book and probably during David's life time (ca. 1000 B.C.). This is probable because the genealogy at the end of Ruth ends with David.
  - C. Other writers date the book during Solomon's reign (ca. 950 B.C.) or even as late as Manasseh (ca. 680 B.C.). Whichever date is selected, it must be early enough to accommodate the author's familiarity with the period of the judges ("the days when judges governed," 1:1). It must also be late enough to support the writer's requirement to explain the custom of the ceremony of the sandal (4:7).
  - D. Though the date of composition is uncertain, the story of Ruth itself takes place in the latter part of the period of the Judges (ca. 1100 B.C.) and covers a time span of about twelve years. This period of Israel's history was generally a desert of rebellion and immorality, a period of extreme spiritual and moral decay; but the story of Ruth stands in contrast as an oasis of integrity and righteousness.

VI. Map

THE STORY OF RUTH

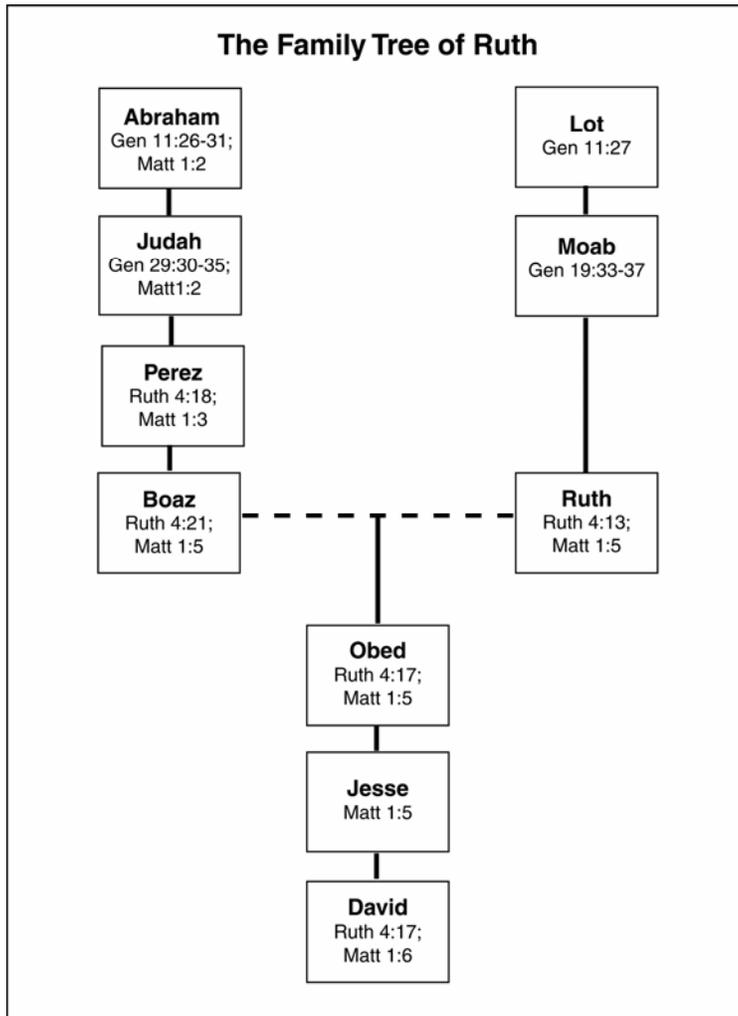


VII. Themes

**MEGATHEMES IN RUTH**

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Explanation</b>	<b>Importance</b>
Faithfulness	Ruth's faithfulness to Naomi as a daughter-in-law and friend is a great example of love and loyalty. Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz are also faithful to God and his laws. Throughout the story we see God's faithfulness to his people.	Ruth's life was guided by faithfulness toward God, which showed in her loyalty toward the people she knew. To be loyal and loving in relationships, we must imitate God's faithfulness in our relationships with others.
Kindness	Ruth showed great kindness to Naomi. In turn, Boaz showed kindness to Ruth—a despised Moabite woman with no money. God showed his kindness to Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz by bringing them together for his purposes.	Just as Boaz showed his kindness by buying back land to guarantee Ruth and Naomi's inheritance, so Christ showed his kindness by dying for us to guarantee our eternal life. God's kindness should motivate us to love and honor him.
Integrity	Ruth showed high moral character by being loyal to Naomi, by her clean break from her former land and customs, and by her hard work in the fields. Boaz showed integrity in his moral standards, his honesty, and by following through on his commitments.	When we have experienced God's faithfulness and kindness, we should respond by showing integrity. Just as the values by which Ruth and Boaz lived were in sharp contrast to those of the culture portrayed in Judges, so our lives should stand out from the world around us.
Protection	We see God's care and protection over the lives of Naomi and Ruth. His supreme control over circumstances brings them safety and security. He guides the minds and activities of people to fulfill his purposes.	No matter how devastating our present situation may be, our hope is in God. His resources are infinite. We must believe that he can work in the life of any person—whether that person is a king or a stranger in a foreign land. Trust his protection.
Prosperity/ Blessing	Ruth and Naomi came to Bethlehem as poor widows, but they soon became prosperous through Ruth's marriage to Boaz. Ruth became the great-grandmother of King David. Yet the greatest blessing was not the money, the marriage, or the child; it was the quality of love and respect between Ruth, Boaz, and Naomi.	We tend to think of blessings in terms of prosperity rather than the high-quality relationships God makes possible for us. No matter what our economic situation, we can love and respect the people God has brought into our lives. In so doing, we give and receive blessings. Love is the greatest blessing.

VIII. Distinguished Descendants



IX. Outline of the book

Outline 1: (The Nelson Study Bible)

- I. Sojourn in the land of Moab 1:1–22
  - A. Tragedy in Moab 1:1–5
  - B. Friendship and faith in Moab 1:6–22
- II. Ruth's first encounter with Boaz 2:1–23
  - A. Boaz's introduction 2:1–3
  - B. Boaz's discovery of Ruth 2:4–13
  - C. Boaz's concern for Ruth 2:14–23
- III. Ruth and Boaz at the threshing floor 3:1–18
  - A. Ruth and Naomi's daring decision 3:1–7

- B. Boaz's delightful duty 3:8–18
- IV. Redemption of Ruth by Boaz 4:1–22
  - A. The relative's refusal to redeem 4:1–6
  - B. Boaz's choice to redeem 4:7–12
  - C. The reward of redemption 4:13–22

Outline 2: (Expositor's Bible Commentary)

- I. An Israelite Family's Sojourn in Moab (1:1–5)
  - A. Famine in Judah (1:1–2)
  - B. Deaths of Naomi's Husband and Children (1:3–5)
- II. Naomi's Return to Judah (1:6–22)
  - A. Naomi's Appeal to Her Daughters-in-law (1:6–15)
  - B. Ruth's Pledge to Remain with Naomi (1:16–18)
  - C. Arrival of Naomi and Ruth in Bethlehem (1:19–22)
- III. Ruth the Gleaner (2:1–23)
  - A. In the Fields of Boaz (2:1–3)
  - B. Boaz's Notice of Ruth (2:4–7)
  - C. Boaz's Provision for Ruth (2:8–16)
  - D. Ruth's Conversation with Naomi about Boaz (2:17–23)
- IV. Encounter at the Threshing Floor (3:1–18)
  - A. Naomi's Advice to Ruth (3:1–5)
  - B. Ruth at the Feet of Boaz (3:6–13)
  - C. Ruth's Return to Naomi (3:14–18)
- V. A Transaction at the City Gate (4:1–13)
  - A. A Kinsman's Refusal to Redeem Naomi's Land (4:1–6)
  - B. Boaz's Purchase of the Land (4:7–12)
- VI. Birth of a Son to Boaz and Ruth (4:13–17)
- VI. The Genealogy of David (4:18–22)

Outline 3: (The New American Commentary)  
The Preservation of Israel's Royal Line

- Act 1: The Crisis for the Line (1:1–21)
  - 1. The Setting for the Crisis (1:1–2)
  - 2. The Nature of the Crisis (1:3–5)
  - 3. The Response to the Crisis (1:6–18)
  - 4. The Interpretation of the Crisis (1:19–21)

Act 2: The Ray of Hope for the Line (1:22-2:23)

1. The New Setting (1:22-2:1)
2. The Initiative of Ruth (2:2-3)
3. The Grace of Boaz (2:4-16)
4. The Results (2:17-23)

Act 3: The Complication for the Line (3:1-18)

1. The Scheme (3:1-5)
2. The Implementation of the Scheme (3:6-15)
3. The Results of the Scheme (3:16-18)

Act 4: The Rescue of the Line (4:1-17)

1. The Legal Resolution (4:1-12)
2. The Genealogical Resolution (4:13-17)

Epilogue: The Royal Genealogy (4:18-22)