

Ruth

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Chapter 1

Culture, History, and Style

Every Bible study should start with the Bible. Please read Ruth 1-4 now to get a feel for the entire work. It is not long, and is a very easy and enjoyable read. See you in a few minutes.

Everyone has a favorite book of the Bible. While all the books are valuable and to be enjoyed by the believer, certain books are particularly enjoyable because it hits you where you live, or want to live, or you get it more, or a myriad of other possible reasons. For me, Ruth is that special favorite book. It has been called the greatest literary work on a small scale. It is a romance, a story of love worth imitating. It also foreshadows the love of Christ for His church, the redemption of a gentile into the presence of God.

When does the story take place? When did the judges rule Israel? Before or after Moses? Joshua? David? The time of the judge's rule was around 1375-1041 BC. Read Ruth 4:18-22. How far back from David did Ruth live? Which Judge ruled at this time? People disagree over this, since the genealogy allows for gaps (i.e. the term for father could also be translated ancestor), but it must have been between Gideon and Jair (Judges 6 - 10:5).

The time of the judges was not a stable time, and the people did whatever they felt was right in their own eyes. Relativism is not a new thing. The story is about the love of Boaz and Ruth. Boaz was a faithful Jewish man, who was a mighty man in every sense of the word. Ruth was the ultimate strong and beautiful maiden, though she was from Moab, who was an enemy of Israel due to what they had done when Israel was entering the land. Thus is the tale of star crossed love that ends in joy, because God is the author of history and he makes the most worthwhile stories.

Chapter 2

Ruth 1: To Moab and Back

2.1 Journey to Moab

Names and their meanings are very important in the Bible, and nowhere is that more important than in the book of Ruth. What are the four members of the family and what do their names mean?

- Elimelech means “my God is king.”
- Naomi means “blessed.”
- Mahlon means “sick.”
- Chilion means “pining.”

How do the names fit in their lives?

Why do they leave Bethlehem (“house of bread”)? Think of the irony in this. They ignore God’s protection in the house of bread to seek bread elsewhere. Where do they go? Where do the Moabites come from? Read Genesis 19:30-38. What was their history with Israel? Read Numbers 22:1-6. Why does Elimelech go to Moab of all places? Given that He is traveling about 20 to 50 miles, how can a natural famine end in such a short distance? Why don’t the Moabites help? What is happening during the time of the Judges? In all likelihood this happens at one of the times that an enemy army comes in and destroys the food in Israel, because God is correcting their wrongs. Moab would not have the blessing of God’s correction. Yes, I mean that, it was a blessing. God can either correct you when you do wrong, so you will learn to do the right, as a loving parent, or He can wait till you have filled up the cup of wrath for His final judgement, as the criminal system does. I would rather have the former. That doesn’t mean God doesn’t discipline some He doesn’t save, or let some run then pull them in, it means that discipline is a form of love and kindness, that God graciously showers and He deserves praise for it. As an added benefit it is good for us. Elimelech did not follow his king through the tough time of discipline,

seeking an easy way out, but bringing only sorrow on himself and his family. Have you ever done that? Many do. Learn from the mistakes of Elimelech to save yourself much sorrow. Love the discipline of the Lord (See Hebrews 12).

What happens to Elimelech? Some Rabinic teachings (I believe the Talmud) say this was a punishment on him. Do you think so? Why or why not? Think about the basis of your judging, is it Scripture or opinion. It is vital that a Christian reason by Scripture not self, even if you get the right answer. The reason is every bit as important. Who do the sons marry? Were Israelites supposed to marry Moabites? The name of the Moabite ladies are also of great importance.

- Orpah means “stubborn” (literally strong necked).
- Ruth means “friendship.”

How do these names fit?

2.2 Return to Bethlehem

Why does Naomi return? What is the reaction of her daughters-in-law? How does Naomi respond? What does Orpah do? What is significant about Ruth’s response? This reminds me of a parable of Jesus. Read Matthew 13:1-23. Which soil best describes each of the daughters-in-law?

What does Naomi do when she gets to Bethlehem and is recognized? Why is she bitter (Mara is “bitterness”)? How is this like how we react when trials come? Why does Naomi think she is coming back empty when she has Ruth? Who does Naomi blame for her situation?

What time do they arrive? The beginning of barley harvest was around the end of April, after the Passover and the Feast of Firstfruits, but before Pentecost. What is significant about these end markers to us as Christians? Do you think they are significant to the story?

Chapter 3

Naomi: Portrait of Israel

Naomi is a sad defeated widow, who cannot see the friend she has in Ruth. She cannot see past her loss of inheritance and sad situation then is renewed by Ruth, who treats her with such love.

Chapter 4

Ruth 2: Providential Gleanings

4.1 In the Fields of Boaz

Who is Boaz? What is significant about Boaz being a "mighty man of wealth" or a "man of great wealth"? Read Leviticus 25:25-29,35-38 Given Boaz's great wealth and God's commands to help each other, what does this say about Elimelech running to Moab?

- Boaz's name means "fleetness" or "in him is strength" (there is some uncertainty as to the origin).

Does this seem to fit him?

What does it mean to glean? How is Ruth allowed to do this? Read Leviticus 19:9-10, 23:15-22, Deuteronomy 24:19-22. What in particular is so important about the holiday in Leviticus 23? Given that Deuteronomy is often referred to as the law interpreted, what is important about the differences in this passage? Is it just luck that brings Ruth to Boaz's field? What was it?

What is noticeable about Boaz's greeting and the response of his workers? What does this say about Boaz's character? What is the next thing Boaz says? How does he notice Ruth out of all the women in the field?

What do the comments of the man in charge of the harvest have to say about Ruth's character? How well must she be known in Bethlehem given this and Boaz's statement to her? How hard does Ruth work? Does it seem usual? Does Boaz merely fulfill the requirements on him? How does Ruth react? Does Ruth claim she will pay him back? What is so significant about Boaz's reply (see v.12)? Given the complement to her in Boaz's reply, does Ruth feel she earned the favor? How does this relate to our relation with Jesus?

Does Boaz stop the blessings at what we have seen? What else does he do? How much does Ruth glean that day? (an ephah is about 1/2 bushel or 30-40 pounds). What does this say about our life as a Christian? Can we depend on

God to supply our needs? Read Luke 12:22-34. If we are faithful can we count on great riches? Why not? Does Ruth keep it for herself? Does she keep the best and share the rest? What does this show us about how we are to live?

What does Naomi say when she sees the gleanings? What does she say when she hears whose field it is from? Who does Naomi credit with the kindness? Why does Naomi say not to go to others fields? Why didn't she say this before? How long does Ruth stay in Boaz's field?

Chapter 5

Ruth: Portrait of Church

Chapter 6

Ruth 3: Girls and Grain

6.1 At the Threshing Floor

What does Naomi mean when she says "...shall I not seek security for you, ..."? Why the sudden interest in marrying Ruth off? Many have said that Boaz is much older than Ruth, who was probably in her early twenties. He is certainly older than Ruth, but does it seem likely that he is close to Naomi's Age? If Boaz is near Naomi's age, why doesn't she marry him? About how old is Naomi? Read Ruth 1:11-13. Naomi is either toward the end of childbearing age (else why would she say "if I had a son", for she certainly lacked faith in God's providence) or just after childbearing age, hence early 40's to 50's. Thus Boaz is most likely in his early to mid thirties - not quite the old man many paint him to be.

What is winnowing and where would it be done? A Threshing floor was a large, flat stone (or hard packed earth) area where the grain could be pounded to break the grain into wheat and chaff (straw). After the grain had been pounded by a flail (see Ruth 2:17), the wheat would be separated from the chaff by throwing it in the air and letting the breeze blow away the chaff. The breeze blew in the late afternoon till just after dark at this time of the year, hence the reason for the time of day, and you would have to do this outside town. When you were done it would be late so you would have to sleep with the wheat so it was not stolen. Note how accurate the Bible is in even the small details!

What is Naomi's plan? Why ask in secret? Read Deuteronomy 5:5-10. What could she have done? What if he did not want to marry her? Is anything inappropriate suggested in Ruth uncovering Boaz's feet and sleeping there? Does the Bible avoid mentioning sin when it arises in people it is describing? What woke Boaz? What was Ruth doing at the time? Boaz was guarding his food (and hence while "his heart was glad" suggesting he had had some wine he was not likely drunk), and he woke up due to some slight disturbance (also suggesting he was not drunk), so what is the likelihood of there being a prior inappropriate relation without his knowing?

What does Ruth ask? Compare Ruth 2:12 to Ruth 3:9, noting that “spread you cloak” can and often is translated “spread your wing.” Think of how this compares with what Jesus does for the Church. Why does Boaz call Ruth blessed? What did Ruth do in the beginning? What is the kindness she is doing now? Did Ruth also show kindness in how she did this latter good thing (refer to above)?

What is a virtuous woman in the Bible? Read Proverbs 31:10-31. How is Ruth like this? Who wrote Proverbs 31 (Read v.1)? Who is King Lemuel? Rabbinical tradition holds it is Solomon (Lemuel being Bathsheba’s personal name for him, note that in cultures in this area mothers give their sons a personal name that only they use). Assuming for the moment it was Solomon, who might his mother be basing the description of the ideal wife on?

Is there any catch to the plan? What does Boaz say about if the other will press his claim? Is Boaz abandoning his restraint and going against the law for the woman he would marry? Is Boaz not eager for the marriage then?

Why does Ruth leave before light, if there is nothing wrong in what was done? Read Romans 14:14-18. Why does Boaz give her so much grain? How does Naomi interpret it? How does this apply to us? Does Jesus wait to save when we call on him? Can we trust in his salvation?

Chapter 7

Shoeless: Portrait of the Law

Chapter 8

Ruth 4: Redemption at the Gate

At the City Gate

Where does this take place? Why were there so many elders of the city around to witness it? Note that city gates were the city halls and merchant squares (like the mercat crosses of the middle ages), thus business deals were made here and any action requiring judgment was brought here. Why ten? One possible reason is this was the number needed to witness a marriage in ancient Jewish tradition. Was Boaz ready for the nearer kinsman? Had he thought through the best way to do it? How well known does Boaz seem to be at the gates (recall Proverbs 31)?

Why does Boaz say Naomi sold (or is selling) some land? Recall Leviticus 25:35-38. This was a notification that she was poor and seeking help, but not marriage. Does the kinsman want to redeem? Why doesn't he? Several possible reasons have been suggested: he might have a family and inheritors thus not want to divide the inheritance more (Read Deuteronomy 25:6 - only the first son took the dead man's inheritance not the rest), 2) Moabites were outside the covenant and so no matter how great Ruth was she could be displeasing (Read Deuteronomy 23:3-6), 3) he might not have the money to both buy the land and support a wife and family. How is the transfer of redemption right like that in Deuteronomy 25:7-10?

What is the name of the nearer of kin than Boaz, who we meet in the first verse? Why is this man, who plays a key role in half the chapter, unnamed but Elimelech, Mahlon, and Chilion are named and they just go to Moab and die? Would this unnecessarily defame the family line of this man? Was he sinful or wrong for not redeeming? Recalling that the book of Ruth is the Gospel told as a romance, what could this possibly mean that there is another closer redeemer? Is there another who wants to redeem but cannot? Read Romans 3:19-26. How does the Law desire to redeem but cannot? Might this give another reason for ten witnesses? Why can't our sacrifices and deeds save us? Read Haggai 2:10-

14. Does our sin pervade all we do? Is there a taint of selfishness when we help others?

Who were Rachel and Leah? Read Genesis 29:14-18, 35:23-26. Who was Tamar? Read Genesis 38. How does this relate to v. 18? What is the significance of v.14? Who is the kinsman spoken of? What is the significance of the number seven in scripture? How does the scripture view sons? Read Psalm 127. How great is the compliment that Ruth is greater than seven sons? Read 1 Chronicles 2:13-15. How is this an interesting comparison? How does v.16-17 show fulfillment of the Levirate marriage? Why is Boaz listed as the father of Obed in v.21 (also 1 Chronicles 2:12)? Read 1 Chronicles 2:3-4. The situation with Judah and Tamar introduced Levirate marriage, but here also the dead did not receive the legal claim in the genealogy because of their sin. How does this relate to Boaz and Elimelech?

Chapter 9

Boaz: Portrait of Christ

Chapter 10

Why Did Ruth Go To Bethlehem?

This is a much-debated question.

First, eliminate reasons that did not influence her:

1. Food: There was no famine in Moab. Read Ruth 1:1-7
2. Husband: There was no prospect of a husband for her. Read Ruth 1:8-13
We can see that Ruth had no needs that were to be filled in Israel, so it was not a selfish or enlightened self interest decision.

Second, look at what Ruth Says? Read Ruth 1:14-18

1. Friendship
2. God

In some sense this should end the discussion, because Ruth tells us what motivates her. Friendship is a little vague though. Ruth certainly expresses love and friendship to Naomi but does Naomi return it? Look at what kind of friend Naomi is. Read Ruth 1:19-2:3

1. Naomi saw only her own suffering
2. Naomi said she came back empty when she came back with Ruth, (In Chapter 4 others see Ruth as better than 7 sons)
3. Naomi did not advise Ruth where to safely glean

Ruth came to give friendship to Naomi, not to get it from her. Friendship was Ruth's gift to Naomi, God was the gift for Ruth. What you choose to do without return does say more about you than what you get paid back for. Think again about how we are to live.

Third, examine the labor Ruth had to do? Read Ruth 2:4-9 Note that Ruth could have gone to her parents house, where people would help her, and her life would be much easier.

1. Ruth took the harder route and did not fear the labor.
2. Ruth did not seek the family plan.

Fourth, see how Boaz saw her decision? Read Ruth 2:10-16

1. Taking care of a mother-in-law she loved, not friend as would call it today.
2. Living in a land as a stranger.
3. Seeking refuge and consolation in God, which Boaz partially fulfills.

Fifth, see the danger Naomi did not protect Ruth from. Read Ruth 2:17-23

1. Didn't know where Ruth gleaned.
2. Didn't advise of relatives who would help.
3. Didn't look to God for care.
4. Didn't warn of people who would harm.

So why did Ruth go?

	Moab	Israel
Needs	Provided by family	Gained by hard work
Family	Whole family, husband's grave, sister-in-law	Depressed Mother-in-law
Friends	Friends and people she grew up with	Total stranger with uncertain reception
Marriage	Potential for remarriage	No marriage prospects
Difficulty	Easy, no trouble	Hard, dangerous trip
Comfort	People to comfort	Must provide comfort
Influences	Human urging	God's will

Ruth trusted in God and wanted to serve Him, and God wanted her to go.

We could stop here at seeing the beauty of God's sovereignty in Ruth's life. That would miss the hard part for us. Lets look at Ruth and ourselves in light of Luke 9:57-10:7.

- We are to follow without fear of earthly provision. Note this does not mean we should not work or plan, rather this should not be the goal and motivator of our life. Our goal must be to glorify God and enjoy Him. We can look at this as only food and clothing, but this also has to do with any desire we put above service to God: money, success, power, influence, marriage prospects, etc. How did Ruth do? How do you and I?
- God demands our service not our excuses. Note that bodies were buried immediately since there was no refrigeration or preservation and bodies begin stinking quickly. This man came to listen but did not want to act. He had a good sounding reason, devotion to family. Robertson suggests as in Tobit 4 (from apocrypha), the man's father was old and near death.

The excuse is an indefinite one to avoid following God. Obedience to parents is based on obedience to God not the other way around. The man put devotion to parents above devotion to God. Did Ruth make excuses and put family above God? Do you and I?

- The last one asks the smallest time lapse. He asks what Elisha did, Elisha also got disapproval for it though he showed his seriousness in what he did. Some suggest that this implies putting ones affairs in order. Matthew Henry suggests this is to get approval. The key idea though is where is the heart and priorities. The man wanted to do this before serving God. The man did not ask to preach the kingdom to His parents. The man did not ask to bring his parents to Christ. The man held one area of His life from Christ. Did Ruth? Do you and I?
- Finally, we see what we are to do. We are to go into the harvest. The harvest is discipleship of others, but note that it is in context of “secular” work. We are to do all things to God’s glory and then discipleship will naturally flow out. This is not something to avoid, or make excuses. We must go joyfully. We are to pray for the harvest. We are to pray specifically for the harvest, the workers, and individuals we are/would like to disciple. We are to labor in the harvest. The harvest is labor, it has its rewards, but it is work. We cannot get discouraged and we must train. We are to glory and trust in God. Did Ruth? Do you and I?

Chapter 11

Final Gleanings From Ruth

Types in the Old Testament

Sovereignty of God in the calling of Ruth

Ruth and Orpah: Two types of seeds

Boaz and shoeless: two covenants

Boaz: Mighty man of God