

# THE BOOK OF RUTH

*God's Loving Kindness Exemplified*

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An Outline Study Guide

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## INTRODUCTION

### A. MAIN IDEAS

1. God's sovereignty, wisdom, and loyal love are often disguised in difficult circumstances and shown through the kindness of others<sup>1</sup>
2. God welcomes non-Israelites into the Mosaic Covenant thus fulfilling a key part of the Abrahamic Covenant that all nations would be blessed through his seed
3. The book also promotes the practice of Israel's covenant ideal, the lifestyle of loving-kindness (H. *hesed*)<sup>2</sup>
4. It also teaches God's divine providence which brought forth King David (4:17-22) who became an ancestor of Jesus Christ

### B. TWO KEY THEMES

1. Loving kindness: Ruth shows Naomi loving kindness (*hesed*) particularly in leaving her home country

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<sup>1</sup> ESV, 475.

<sup>2</sup> LaSor, Hubbard, Bush, 525.

and family to care for her mother-in-law (1:16-17; 2:11, 18, 23) because she loves her (4:15)

- a) Boaz shows loving kindness in his welcome to Ruth, acting as kinsman-redeemer (4:9-10) and marrying Ruth (4:13)
  - b) This same lovingkindness reflects the same loving kindness that the Lord shows to his people (Exod. 15:13; Deut. 7:8-9; Psa. 103:4; 106:7, 10; 136:10-15<sup>3</sup>)
2. Redemption: Redemption is directly related to loving kindness and plays a key role in this narrative (2:20). The words "redeem" (6x)," redeemer" (8x), "redemption" (1x) are used in this book (BibleWorks).

### C. TEN REASONS WHY THIS BOOK IS SO IMPORTANT

1. This book helps believers to better understand how God's love is constant and firm (cf. Rom. 8:38-39)
2. In this book we can see parallels between Ruth's loyal love for Naomi and God's loyal love for Israel and all his children
3. As Boaz is a kinsman-redeemer, Christ is our kinsman-redeemer, giving us hope for the future
4. In Ruth 3:9, we see a beautiful and poignant picture of the needy supplicant, unable to rescue herself, requesting of the kinsman-redeemer that he cover her with his protection, redeem her, and make her his wife
5. In the same way, the Lord Jesus Christ bought us for Himself, out of the curse, out of our destitution; made us His own beloved bride; and blessed us for all generations
6. He is the true kinsman-redeemer of all who call on Him in faith<sup>4</sup>
7. Ruth is an example of how God can change a life and take it in a direction He has foreordained, and we see Him working out His perfect plan in Ruth's life, just as He does with all His children (Romans 8:28)
8. Although Ruth came from a pagan background in Moab, once she met the God of Israel, she became a living testimonial to Him by faith
9. Even though she lived in humble circumstances before marrying Boaz, she believed that God was faithful to care for His people
10. Also, Ruth is an example to us that God rewards faithfulness: "And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him" (Hebrews 11:6)

## BACKGROUND

### A. AUTHOR

1. Samuel (according to rabbinic tradition) but this seems unlikely because Samuel died before David actually became king and Ruth 4:17-22 implies that David's kingship was an established fact at the time of writing<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> ESV, 476.

<sup>4</sup> Houdmann, GotQuestions.org <<https://www.gotquestions.org/kinsman-redeemer.html>>

<sup>5</sup> ESV, 475.

2. The author of this book was most likely a contemporary of King David

## B. MAIN CHARACTERS

1. Ruth: (H. *reeiut*) meaning "friendship, association."<sup>6</sup>
2. Naomi: (H. Na'omiy) meaning "pleasantness."<sup>7</sup> Her name is used more often in this book than Ruth's, emphasizing her prominent role in the narrative.
3. Mara: means bitter in Hebrew.
4. Boaz: means "swiftness" in Hebrew.

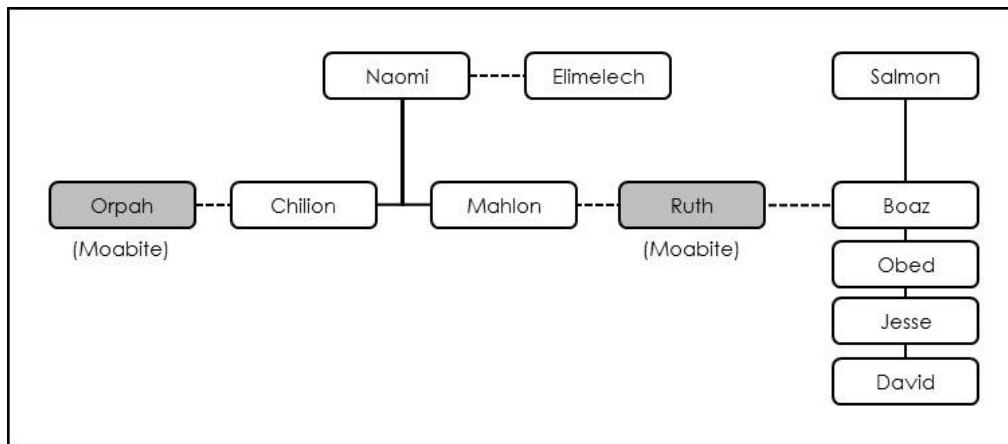


Figure 1: The Relationships of the Characters

## C. DATE

1. The book opens by referring back to the period when this story took place, "In the days when the judges ruled..." (1390-1050 BC)
2. However, the mention of David (4:17) and his genealogy (4:18-22) places the actual writing after David's accession to the throne (2 Samuel 2) in 1010 BC<sup>8</sup>

## D. WHERE DID THE STORY TAKE PLACE? (SEE MAP)

1. Moab
  - a) The area of Moab is east of the Jordan River.
  - b) The plateau has always been famous for its abundant pasturage (2 Kgs 3:4), and Moab's soil and climate are quite suitable for growing wheat and barley

<sup>6</sup> Jensen, 163.

<sup>7</sup> Behind the Name <<http://www.behindthename.com/name/naomi-1>>

<sup>8</sup> ESV, 475

- c) Moabite Religion: During the 3rd and 2nd millennia B.C., Moabite religion was probably similar to that practiced by the Canaanites, though the religion of Moab eventually developed into a relatively distinct system
- d) Although other deities were worshiped by the Moabites, Chemosh was their national god
- e) The OT refers to the Moabites as “people of Chemosh” (Num. 21:29; Jer. 48:46), and the frequent appearance of “Chemosh” in Moabite personal names points to this god's elevated status?

- 2. Bethlehem: Sheltered from scenes of strife and heathenism, the little village of Bethlehem had retained among its inhabitants the purity of ancestral faith and the simplicity of primitive manners<sup>10</sup>

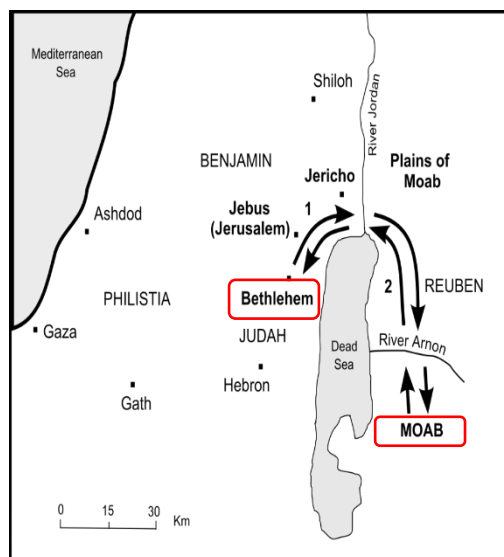


Figure 2: Map of Israel

### E. WHY WAS IT WRITTEN?

- 1. Given the book of Ruth's interest in all Israel (4:7, 11), it may have been written in hopes that the 12 tribes, which divided into two nations in 930 BC, would reunite
- 2. This book explains the providential ancestry of David who would become such a uniting king

## CHAPTER 1: NAOMI LOSES EVERYTHING

### A. NAOMI WIDOWED (1:1-5)

- 1. Famine in the land (during the days of the judges)
  - a) This famine could have been caused by the Midianites (not Moabites) who oppressed Israel for seven years
  - b) Their invasions were usually accompanied by the destruction of the produce of the soil (Judges 6:3, 4), from which famine could easily result.<sup>11</sup>
- 2. Famine causes Elimelech and his family to move to Moab
  - a) Naomi, Elimelech, Mahlon and Chilion were Ephrathites<sup>12</sup> from Bethlehem from the tribe of Judah
  - b) Israelites did not like Moabites because they would not let them pass through their land during the Exodus wanderings
  - c) Also, just before the conquest, Moabite women seduced Israelite men into worshipping Baal



<sup>9</sup> Elwell, Walter A., and Barry J. Beitzel. *Baker encyclopedia of the Bible* 1988: 1478. Print. Logos software

<sup>10</sup> Edersheim, 238.

<sup>11</sup> Warren Doud, *The Book of Ruth, An Expository Study*.

<sup>12</sup> Ephrathites were natives of Ephrath also known as Bethlehem, 1 Samuel 17:12 (Nelson, 409).

(Num. 25:1-9)

3. Naomi married to Elimelech—had two sons (Mahlon and Chilion)
  - a) Mahlon married Ruth (4:10)
  - b) Chilion married Orpah
4. Elimelech dies
5. Ten years later both sons die
6. Naomi, Ruth and Orpah as widows became poverty stricken—no one to care for them

#### **B. RUTH'S LOYALTY TO NAOMI (1:6-18)**

1. Naomi decides to return to the land of Judah where the famine was now gone, and where she might find relatives
2. She encourages Orpah and Ruth to return to their families
3. Orpah departed—Ruth stayed with Naomi

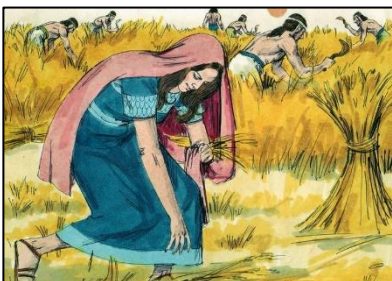
#### **C. NAOMI WITH RUTH RETURNS TO BETHLEHEM (1:19-22)**

1. The town was "stirred because of them"
  - a) Possibly because of Ruth being a Moabite
  - b) Possibly seeing Naomi without Elimelech
2. Naomi chooses to be called "Mara" meaning bitter because she went away full but returned empty
3. They arrived at the beginning of the barley harvest

## CHAPTER 2: RUTH MEETS BOAZ

#### **A. RUTH GLEANS IN BOAZ'S FIELD (2:1)**

1. Boaz was a relative of Elimelech
2. Boaz was a "worthy" man (connotes character, wealth, position, or strength)<sup>13</sup>



#### **B. GLEANING FIELDS (2:2-3)**

1. The act of collecting leftover crops from farmers' fields after they have been commercially harvested or on fields where it is not economically profitable to harvest<sup>14</sup>
2. According to the Mosaic Law, the poor of the land had the privilege of gleaning fields of the more fortunate (See Deut. 24:19)<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup> ESV, 479.

<sup>14</sup> Some ancient cultures promoted gleaning as an early form of a welfare system.

<sup>15</sup> Merrill, 186.

**C. BOAZ MEETS RUTH (2:4-13)**

1. Boaz enquires about Ruth
2. Boaz encourages Ruth to continue gleaning in his field because of her kindness to Naomi

**D. BOAZ INVITES RUTH TO EAT WITH HIM (2:14-16)**

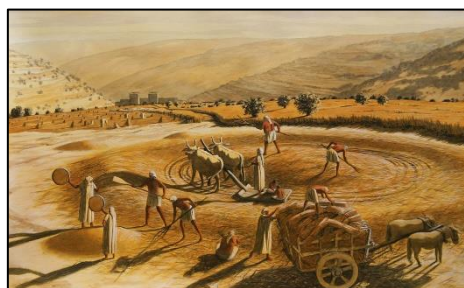
1. Ruth is invited to eat with Boaz and his workers
2. Boaz instructs his workers to let Ruth glean from among the sheaves—his favor toward Ruth thus goes beyond the requirements of the law

**E. RUTH RETURNS TO NAOMI IN BETHLEHEM (2:17-23)**


1. Naomi tells Ruth that Boaz is a close relative of hers, “one of her redeemers”
2. The kinsman-redeemer is a male relative who, according to various laws of the Pentateuch, had the privilege or responsibility to act on behalf of a relative who was in trouble, danger, or need
  - a) The Hebrew term (*go-el*) for kinsman-redeemer designates one who delivers or rescues (Genesis 48:16; Exodus 6:6) or redeems property or person (Leviticus 27:9–25, 25:47–55)
  - b) The kinsman who redeems or vindicates a relative is illustrated most clearly in this book of Ruth, where the kinsman-redeemer is Boaz
3. Unknowingly they glean the fields belonging to Boaz, a distant relative of Elimelech
4. Boaz sees Ruth and takes a liking to her. He makes sure that there is plenty of grain on the ground to be gleaned by Ruth
5. Naomi recognizes Boaz as a kinsman-redeemer (a relative who volunteers to take responsibility for the extended family)

**CHAPTER 3: RUTH AND BOAZ AT THE THRESHING FLOOR****A. RUTH AND BOAZ AT THE THRESHING FLOOR (3:1-13)**

1. Threshing floor (3:2, 3, 6, 14). Sheaves of grain would be opened up and the stalks spread across the threshing floor. Pairs of donkeys or oxen (or sometimes cattle, or horses) would then be walked round and round, often dragging a heavy threshing board behind them, to tear the ears of grain from the stalks, and loosen the grain itself from the husks. After this threshing process, the broken stalks and grain were collected and then thrown up into the air with a wooden winnowing fork or a winnowing fan. The chaff would be blown away by the wind; the short torn straw would fall some distance away; while the heavier grain would fall at the winnowing's feet. The grain could then be further cleansed by sieving.





2. Uncovering Boaz's feet (3:4, 7, 8, 14) . This was not a seductive act, it was an Israelite custom. A close relative would marry the widow of a kinsman who had no son in order to produce one. By doing this, Ruth was expressing her desire to marry Boaz (which the older, gracious Boaz would not have initiated with a younger woman). By observing this social custom Ruth was asking Boaz to claim her in marriage as her kinsman-redeemer (Ruth became part of Naomi's family when she married to her son, Mahlon). This custom also meant that Boaz could find Ruth a husband if he chose not or marry her himself, the choice was his.
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3. "Spread the corner of your garment over me" (3:9). To cover her with his skirt was a token of matrimony. No doubt the idiom reflected the custom, still practiced by some in the Middle East, of a man throwing a garment over the woman he has decided to take as his wife, and symbolizing protection as well as fellowship.
4. "Let it be known" (3:14). This is a phrase describing Boaz's concern for propriety and for his and Ruth's good reputation.
5. Six measures of barley (3:15, 17). About 60 lbs. of Barley, a rather heavy load for a woman
6. Naomi tells Ruth to put on her best clothes and go to the threshing floor where Boaz was to sleep (3:1-3)
- Naomi's strategic plan was based on the fact that her deceased husband Elimelech still possessed land in Bethlehem but her poverty had forced her to sell the property (4:3)
  - Naomi, however, understood that Boaz was a near relative of Elimelech (2:1, 3), and was a "candidate" (potential) redeemer who could ransom Elimelech's field as summarized in Leviticus
  - If a fellow countryman of yours becomes so poor (like Naomi) he has to sell part of his property, then his nearest kinsman (Go'el/Ga'al) is to come and buy back what his relative has sold (Lev. 25:25)
7. Ruth was told to go lie down near Boaz and uncover his feet (3:4-5)
- This was not a seductive act, it was an Israelite custom
  - A close relative would marry the widow of a kinsman who had no son in order to produce one<sup>16</sup>
  - By doing this, Ruth was expressing her desire to marry Boaz (which the older, gracious Boaz would not have initiated with a younger woman)<sup>17</sup>
8. Boaz is sleeping at the threshing floor to guard his crop against enemy attacks who would steal his grains (3:6-7)<sup>18</sup>
9. At midnight Boaz was startled and caught off guard when he saw a woman at his feet (3:8)
- Remember that he was sleeping by the barley to protect it (these were evil "days of the judges" (Jdg. 21:25; Ruth 1:1) and he may have had momentary fear that he was being robbed
  - Most crimes take place in the dark so Boaz may have suspected foul play
10. Boaz asked "who are you?" Ruth identified herself and said to Boaz "spread the corner of your

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<sup>16</sup> LHB, 521.

<sup>17</sup> Precept Austin

<sup>18</sup> See 1 Samuel 23:1.



garment over me" (3:9)

- a) By observing this social custom Ruth was asking Boaz to claim her in marriage<sup>19</sup> as her kinsman-redeemer (Ruth became part of Naomi's family when she married to her son, Mahlon)
- b) This custom also meant that Boaz could find Ruth a husband if he chose not or marry her himself, the choice was his

11. Boaz blesses Ruth for choosing him over other younger men and for being a worthy woman (3:10-13)

- a) Since Boaz is older than Ruth (refers to her as "daughter" (3:11)
- b) Boaz now informs Ruth that there is another closer relative (redeemer) but if that relative chooses not to marry Ruth then Boaz promises that he will (3:12-13)
- c) He asks her to remain there until morning because it would have been both unsafe and difficult at night (3:13)

12. Notice the integrity of Boaz in this scene in this scene

- a) First, he did not send Ruth home in the middle of the night for that would have been potentially dangerous. And even though she lay at his feet the remainder of the night, his intentions remained steadfastly honorable. Boaz would protect her and would not touch her inappropriately. These actions speak volumes about this godly man's character in the dark days of the judges (Jdg. 21:25).
- b) Second, Boaz also protected the rights of the Go'el/Ga'al who was an even closer relative than he. This man understood denial of self, long before the "Greater Boaz" uttered those words (Mark 8:34).

## B. RUTH RETURNS TO NAOMI IN THE CITY (3:14-18)

1. Ruth secretly leaves Boaz's threshing floor while it is still dark just after Boaz gives her six measures (about 60 lbs.) of barley for her and Naomi (3:14-15)

- a) "Until morning" (3:13, 14) - Here is another promise from Boaz, specifically declaring that he will resolve the issue the next day!
- b) "Let it be known" (3:14) is a phrase describing Boaz's concern for propriety and for his and Ruth's good reputation<sup>20</sup>

2. Ruth explained to Naomi everything that just happened (3:16-17)

3. Naomi instructs Ruth to be patient until Boaz can settle the matter (3:18)



## C. HOW THIS CHAPTER RELATES TO YOU

1. Like Boaz, God praises you

- a) Ruth 3:10 (Boaz: "you have made this kindness greater than the first, and did not choose younger men")
- b) Rom. 2:29. "No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man's praise is not from men, but from

<sup>19</sup> ESV, 481.

<sup>20</sup> ESV, 482.

God."<sup>21</sup>

- c) When we say God rejoices in our thinking and feeling and doing what is right, we mean that he delights in our seeing, savoring, and showing his own supreme value.
  - d) God values our valuing him. God delights in our delighting in him.
  - e) We delight in being praised by God because it confirms and increases our focus on him (John Piper)
2. Like Boaz, God is your protector
- a) Ruth 3:11, 13-14 (Boaz: "do not fear; remain here this night")
  - b) <https://www.gotquestions.org/Bible-protection.html>
  - c) Prov. 2:7-8
  - d) Well, it can't possibly mean that he shields us from physical maladies, traffic accidents, or even the loss of a loved one.
  - e) Example: God allowed harm to come to Job but only to a certain point.
  - f) God does not protect us from difficult situations which can cause us to grow (Jas. 1:2-3)
  - g) But by comparing himself to a shepherd, Jehovah assures us of his heartfelt desire to protect us (Ezekiel 34:11-16).
3. Like Boaz, God is your provider
- a) Ruth 3:15. Boaz gave Ruth six measures of barley...about 60 lbs.
  - b) Phil 4:19. He knows our deepest most immediate needs
  - c) Matt. 7:7. We are to ask God to meet our needs (cf. Matt. 6:11 "give us daily bread")
  - d) Example: Heb. 10:36. We have the need for food, shelter, loving relationships, spiritual growth, victory over death

## CHAPTER 4: BOAZ REDEEMS RUTH

### A. THE REDEMPTION OF THE LAND (4:1-17)

1. Boaz offers Naomi's estate to the closer relative who turns down the offer because he would have to marry Ruth—this would have complicated his inheritance to his sons if he had a child through her
2. Boaz then "buys" the property and the deal was sealed by taking off his sandal and giving it to the closer relative
  - a) Behind this act stands an ancient Israelite custom: ownership of an ancestral land always had to remain in the family<sup>22</sup>
  - b) A family might mortgage its land to fend off poverty, but the law required the nearest next of kin to buy it back into family ownership (Lev. 25:25ff)
3. The deal included Ruth whom he married
4. Ruth and Boaz eventually have a son, who was named Obed ("servant," "worshipper")

<sup>21</sup> See <http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/why-god-tells-us-he-delights-in-his-children>

<sup>22</sup> LHB, 522.

## B. THE GENEALOGY OF DAVID (4:18-21)

1. Ruth, becomes the great-grandmother of King David (See Matthew 1:1-17)
2. By bringing in a non-Israelite into the covenant, God is fulfilling his promise to Abraham that all nations will be blessed through his seed (Gen. 12:3)
3. See Figure 1.

## THEOLOGICAL THEMES

John MacArthur offers the following major theological themes in the book of Ruth<sup>23</sup>

1. Ruth, who was a Moabitess, illustrates how God's plan of redemption extended beyond the Jews to Gentiles.
2. Ruth clearly shows how women are coheirs with men in God's plan of salvation.
3. Ruth exemplifies the qualities of the virtuous woman in Proverbs 31.
4. Ruth illustrates how God loves and cares for seemingly unimportant people.
5. Boaz is a type of Christ as our kinsman-redeemer.

## GOD'S LOVING-KINDNESS (*HESED*) EXEMPLIFIED

### A. *HESED* IS DIFFICULT TO TRANSLATE. NO SINGLE WORD IN ENGLISH CAPTURES ITS MEANINGS. TRANSLATORS USE WORDS LIKE "KINDNESS," "LOVING-KINDNESS," "MERCY," "LOYALTY." PERHAPS "LOYAL LOVE" IS CLOSE.

1. *Hesed* is one of the richest, most powerful words in the Old Testament. It reflects the loyal love that people committed to the God of the Bible should have for one another. It is not a "mood."
2. *Hesed* is not primarily something people "feel." It is something people DO for other people who have no claim on them.
3. The word *hesed* is displayed throughout the story of Ruth where it is usually translated "kindness." Love is something we do, not primarily something we feel.

### B. *HESED* IN THE BOOK OF RUTH

1. Naomi uses this word of Ruth (1:8)
2. Naomi uses this word of Boaz to explain his lavish act of kindness in Ruth 2:20.
3. Boaz uses this word of Ruth in 3:10: "The Lord bless you, my daughter; this kindness (*hesed*) is greater than what you showed earlier."
4. What happened "earlier"? Ruth did not forsake Naomi and gleaned to provide for her needs. It was more than kindness. It was loyalty to her mother-in-law.
5. In proposing to Boaz she showed her further regard for family relationships. How?
6. When she thought of marriage, she did not go after the "young" men (the Hebrew means "choice,"

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<sup>23</sup> MacArthur, 289

whether rich or poor).

7. Boaz implies that had she wanted to, she could have married a wealthy younger man. She was willing to marry a kinsman other than Boaz if that would help Naomi.<sup>24</sup>



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<sup>24</sup> Discover the Word (<https://discovertheword.org/2010/10/18/the-hebrew-term-hesed-and-what-it-means-for-our-lives-today/>)

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