

RUTH

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BACKGROUND

Sometime shortly before 1100 B.C., during the last days of Israel's judges, an Israelite family moved to the land of Moab to escape a famine in Israel. When the father and two of his sons died, his wife returned to Israel with her Moabite daughter-in-law named Ruth. This set the stage for a beautiful story of faithfulness, love, and marriage. It is included in the Bible because from Ruth the Moabitess and her Israelite second husband, Boaz, would come Jesus the Messiah.

AUTHOR

Unknown.

DATE AND LOCATION

Though it is not known precisely when the story was recorded, it had to be at least a few generations after the events it relates, for three reasons:

- The end of the book mentions David, the great-grandson of Boaz and Ruth.
- The opening expression, "in the days when the judges ruled," implies an author who lived after that time.
- [Ruth 4:7](#) mentions a custom "in those days" that apparently had fallen out of practice.

Ruth was probably written in Jerusalem by a court historian in the time of David or Solomon, between 1000-920 B.C.

PURPOSE

The beginning and end of Ruth reveal much about its purpose.

- The book ends with a genealogy, and the last word of the book is *David*. The primary purpose of Ruth was to document David's godly ancestry.
- A secondary purpose can be seen in the book's opening verses. After preliminary facts set the stage, the drama opens with Naomi expressing her hope that her daughters-in-law will find "rest" or "security" after the deaths of their husbands. The same Hebrew word is found in [Ruth 3:1](#), where again Naomi wishes "a permanent home" for Ruth, this time with a specific plan to achieve that goal. Ruth did indeed find a home in the God and people of Israel, as should all unbelievers. Ruth can be seen as representing the extension of God's grace to Gentiles.

- A final purpose was to show the wonderful, though sometimes hidden, ways in which God meets needs. Naomi was "empty" in [Ruth 1:21](#) but had a full lap (a son) in [Ruth 4:16](#). Note the foreshadowing of Naomi's spiritual "filling" when she was physically filled with food ([Ruth 3:17](#)), as Boaz tells Ruth not to go to her mother-in-law "empty-handed," the same Hebrew word as in [Ruth 1:21](#).

UNIQUE FEATURES

Ruth provides a marvelous illustration of redemption. The law made provision for women who, due to the death of their husband, were left without heirs and faced with the loss of their property. Both heirs ([Deut. 25:5-10](#)) and property ([Leviticus 25:25-28](#)) were to be secured by a "close relative," or "kinsman redeemer" (Hebrew *goel*, [Ruth 2:20](#); [Ruth 3:9, 12-13](#); [Ruth 4:1, 3, 6, 8, 14](#)). This law sanctioned the ancient custom of *levirate* or "brother-in-law" marriage. [Genesis 38:1-10](#) records an incident in which the custom was disregarded; the story of Ruth illustrates its proper application.

The kinsman redeemer had to meet three qualifications:

- he had to be a blood relative.
- he had to be willing to redeem.
- he had to be able to pay the redemption price.

The kinsman redeemer is a beautiful picture of Christ, who met all these qualifications ([Galatians 4:4-5](#); [Ephes. 1:7](#); [Hebrews 2:14-15](#); [1 Peter 1:18-19](#)).

COMPARISON WITH OTHER BIBLE BOOKS

Genesis:

- Genesis, like Ruth, contains examples of God's providence. What at first seems to be coincidence often turns out to be God's plan. Joseph happened to be in the right place at the right time in Egypt, as did the servant of Abraham in [Genesis 24](#).
- The genealogy beginning in [Ruth 4:18](#) is similar to many such lists in Genesis and begins with the same Hebrew phrase as is found there.

Esther:

- Ruth was a Gentile who lived among Jews; Esther was a Jew who lived among Gentiles.
- Ruth married a Jew; Esther married a Gentile.
- Both Ruth and Esther had relatives to obey (for Ruth, her mother-in-law, Naomi; for Esther, her uncle Mordecai), and both were rewarded for their obedience.
- Both books contain evidence of God's providence overruling the "coincidences" of life.

OUTLINE

1. RUTH'S RENUNCIATION ([Ruth 1](#))
 1. The setting of the drama ([Ruth 1:1-5](#))
 2. Naomi's three commands to return ([Ruth 1:6-15](#))
 - C. Ruth's renunciation of her people and gods ([Ruth 1:16-18](#))

D. Naomi's emptiness ([Ruth 1:19-22](#))

II. RUTH'S REAPING ([Ruth 2](#))

- A. Introduction of Boaz ([Ruth 2:1-3](#))
- B. Boaz takes special notice of Ruth ([Ruth 2:4-17](#))
- C. Naomi is glad to hear of Boaz ([Ruth 2:18-23](#))

III. RUTH'S REQUEST ([Ruth 3](#))

- A. Naomi's plan ([Ruth 3:1-5](#))
- B. Ruth's proposal ([Ruth 3:6-9](#))
- C. Boaz's pledge ([Ruth 3:10-13](#))
- D. Ruth returns to Naomi ([Ruth 3:14-18](#))

IV. RUTH'S REDEMPTION ([Ruth 4](#))

- A. Boaz confronts the nearer kinsman redeemer ([Ruth 4:1-8](#))
- B. Witnesses affirm Boaz as kinsman redeemer ([Ruth 4:9-12](#))
- C. Marriage of Boaz and Ruth; blessing of Naomi ([Ruth 4:13-17](#))
- D. Genealogy: From Ruth to King David ([Ruth 4:18-22](#))

TIMELINE

c. 1100 B.C. ?:	Events of Ruth
1093 B.C.:	Call of Samuel
1075 B.C.:	Samson, last judge
1051 B.C.:	Saul, 1st king
1004 B.C.:	David, descendant of Ruth, becomes king

[Ruth 1:1-5](#) *A Jewish family moves to Moab.* Elimelech and Naomi and their family moved to Moab because of a famine in Israel. Apparently at this time Moab was not hostile to Judah. The family, however, underwent even greater hardships while in Moab. First Elimelech died. Then his two sons married Moabite women and died soon afterward. The family was reduced to Naomi and her two Gentile daughters-in-law.

[Ruth 1:6-18](#) *"Your people shall be my people."* Hearing that Israel's famine had ended, Naomi decided to return there, but pleaded with both of her daughters-in-law to stay with their people and find

new husbands. While Orpah reluctantly did so, Ruth could not leave her beloved mother-in-law. She declared devotion not only for Naomi but for Naomi's people and her God as well.

It is fitting that Naomi, who sought "rest" for others ([Ruth 1:9](#); [Ruth 3:1, 18](#)) while herself experiencing only unrest ([Ruth 1:20](#)), should eventually find rest for herself ([Ruth 4:13-16](#)).

[Ruth 1:19-22](#) *Back in Bethlehem.* Naomi and Ruth's return to Israel caused quite a stir. Feeling that her life was no longer "pleasant" (the meaning of her name), Naomi asked to be called Mara, which means "bitter" (see [Exodus 15:23](#)).

[Ruth 2:1-17](#) *Enter bachelor Boaz.* Boaz, a wealthy unmarried relative of Elimelech, saw Ruth gleaning in his field and, having heard of her loyalty to Naomi, treated her kindly. He gave her permission to glean indefinitely and protected her from his male workers, ordering them to leave some extra stalks for her to pick up.

[Ruth 2:18-23](#) *"Boaz, you say? Glory to God!"* When Naomi learned where Ruth had worked she rejoiced, knowing that Boaz was a "close relative" or "kinsman redeemer" (see [Unique Features](#)). She was well aware of the possibilities this presented for her daughter-in-law.

[Ruth 3:1-5](#) *Her mission: Make a marriage.* Naomi made plans for Ruth to ask Boaz to redeem her. When Boaz retired for the night, Ruth was to lie down, "uncover" his feet, and await an opportunity to speak with him. This was apparently a local custom; though Ruth as a foreigner may have found it strange, she promised to obediently follow Naomi's instructions.

[Ruth 3:6-13](#) *"I'd love to, but there's this problem. . . ."* Ruth uncovered the feet of the sleeping Boaz, and at about midnight he awoke and was startled to find a woman there. Learning her identity and hearing her request, Boaz gladly agreed to be her kinsman redeemer. He pointed out, however, that there was a closer relative who should first be given the opportunity to fulfill that role for Ruth. If that man refused, Boaz promised, he would become Ruth's redeemer.

"Spread the corner of your covering over me" ([Ruth 3:9](#)) is a figure of speech for marriage, portraying the refuge marriage provides. Upon their first meeting ([Ruth 2:4-13](#)), Boaz had commended Ruth for taking "refuge" "under [the] wings" of Israel's God ([Ruth 2:12](#)). The same Hebrew word is used in both verses; it can be translated *wing* or *corner (of a garment)*. Little did Boaz know that he himself would be the means through which God would protect Ruth. [Ezekiel 16:8](#) uses the same imagery to show God's care for Israel.

[Ruth 3:14-18](#) *She returns before she can be recognized.* Ruth did not sleep *with* Boaz, but at his feet; and she arose the next morning early enough to leave without creating gossip. When she returned home and told Naomi how things had gone and of Boaz's generosity, Naomi knew that Boaz would act promptly on Ruth's behalf.

[Ruth 4:1-6](#) *He confronts the man with the prior claim.* Even as Naomi was expressing her confidence in him, Boaz went to the town gate and approached the closer relative concerning Ruth and Naomi. The man initially agreed to redeem their land. But when Boaz mentioned that a widow went along with the land, he declined the offer, fearing an adverse effect on his own financial affairs.

The town gate was the center for social and economic life in ancient Israel. This was where news was first heard, where local and traveling merchants sold their wares in the cool shade of the town walls, where soldiers were stationed, and where legal disputes were handled.

[Ruth 4:7-12](#) *He makes a statement with his sandal.* To affirm his unwillingness to redeem Naomi and Ruth and their land, the nearer relative removed his sandal. Boaz then announced, in the presence of the assembled elders, that he would assume the duties of kinsman redeemer. They affirmed his right to do so, and pronounced a blessing on him.

As [Ruth 4:7](#) explains, the passing of a sandal was one of many symbolic gestures or "sign acts" practiced by the Israelites. Note that, by removing his own sandal, the closer relative may have avoided the public humiliation of having his sandal forcibly removed for declining his responsibility toward Naomi and her dependents (see [Deut. 25:5-10](#)).

Footwear often symbolized ownership in Bible times. Note [Psalm 60:8](#) (KJV), where the Lord cast his shoe over Edom, claiming his ownership of that land. Note also God's directive to Abraham, Moses, and Joshua to claim ownership of Canaan by walking on it ([Gen. 13:17](#); [Deut. 11:24](#); [Jos. 1:3](#)).

[Ruth 4:13-17](#) *They are married; she is blessed.* Ruth and Boaz were married and had a son. Naomi's friends saw this grandchild as a special blessing for Naomi in her bereavement.

[Ruth 4:18-22](#) *Her son: King David's grandfather.* The final verses of Ruth trace the lineage of Boaz, which would eventually produce Israel's Messiah. God did not work only through Israelites, but also through Moabites and even Canaanites (such as Rahab) who believed in him. Ruth was King David's great-grandmother, and Boaz was the son of Rahab, a Canaanite harlot ([Joshua 2](#)).

People to remember from Ruth

- [Boaz](#)
- [Naomi](#)
- [Ruth](#)

BOAZ

(PEOPLE TO REMEMBER FROM RUTH)

Key Facts: Married Ruth, became ancestor of Christ ([Ruth 4:13, 21-22](#); [Matthew 1:5-16](#))

Father: Salmon ([Ruth 4:21](#))

Mother: Rahab ([Matthew 1:5](#))

Wife: Ruth ([Ruth 4:13](#))

Son: Obed ([Ruth 4:13, 17](#))

Occupation: Farmer ([Ruth 2:3](#))

Total Bible References: 33

Key References: [Ruth 2-4](#)

Boaz Speaks

Thank God for the speedy decision of Ruth and Naomi's kinsman redeemer! I practically grabbed the sandal out of his hand before he could change his mind! No doubt about it, Ruth was well worth waiting for. All my friends would agree that I didn't exactly jump into marriage. In fact, some probably wondered if I would ever settle down. ([Ruth 4:6, 8](#))

But my mother had repeatedly urged me to choose a godly woman. Apparently she still suffered from some unpleasant memories concerning her immoral past, in spite of God's marvelous transforming grace. Of course, until that first encounter in the field, neither mother nor son could have imagined that God would select a Moabite widow to answer our prayers. ([Ruth 2:8](#); [Joshua 2:1](#); [Matthew 1:5](#); [Hebrews 11:31](#))

Spiritual Lessons from Boaz

- We should treat everyone kindly—even strangers—for we never know what good might come of such encounters ([Hebrews 13:1](#)). Boaz showed kindness ([Ruth 2:5-16](#)) and found a good wife ([Ruth 4:13](#)).
- As much as he desired Ruth, Boaz acknowledged that there were certain legal responsibilities to fulfill before he could claim her ([Ruth 3:12-13](#)). Emotions should not cause us to take shortcuts around divine or human laws.
- God gives his best to those who allow him to make the choice! By waiting on the Lord, Boaz found a good wife and became an ancestor of Christ ([Ruth 1:15-18](#); [Ruth 2:11-12](#); [Ruth 4:13-22](#)).

Key Verse

"And with the land I have acquired Ruth, the Moabite widow of Mahlon, to be my wife. This way she can have a son to carry on the family name of her dead husband and to inherit the family property here in his hometown. You are all witnesses today" ([Ruth 4:10](#)).

NAOMI

(PEOPLE TO REMEMBER FROM RUTH)

Key Fact: Ruth's mother-in-law ([Ruth 1:3-6](#))

Husband: Elimelech ([Ruth 1:2](#))

Sons: Mahlon and Kilion ([Ruth 1:2](#))

Total Bible References: 21

Key References: [Ruth 1-4](#)

Naomi Speaks

I probably have the dubious distinction of being the only one of my people to exchange a good name for a bad one. You probably know that my given name, Naomi, means "pleasant." But during a terrible emotional storm I changed it to Mara, meaning "bitter." Of course I was not trusting God at the time, or I would have remembered that he often does just the opposite—that is, he often changes a bad name for a good one. I remember Elimelech pointing this out to me and the boys—how God changed the

name of Sarai, meaning "contentious," to Sarah, meaning "princess." He also changed Jacob, "supplanter," to Israel, "one who wrestles with God." ([Ruth 1:20](#); [Genesis 17:15](#); [Genesis 32:28](#))

I am anything but bitter these days, to say the least; that's why I've returned to my original name. A merciful God has indeed bestowed upon me many pleasant blessings, including a wonderful daughter-in-law and a precious grandson. Little Obed has become the light of my life. ([Ruth 1:16-17](#); [Ruth 4:16-17](#))

Spiritual Lessons from Naomi

- We should never conclude in the hour of sorrow, as did Naomi, that "the LORD himself has caused me to suffer" ([Ruth 1:13](#)). In spite of that despair, Naomi later saw that same divine hand in a much more favorable light and promptly acted upon her new understanding ([Ruth 2:20](#); [Ruth 3:1-4](#)).

Key Verse

"One day Naomi said to Ruth, 'My daughter, it's time that I found a permanent home for you, so that you will be provided for' " ([Ruth 3:1](#)).

RUTH

(PEOPLE TO REMEMBER FROM RUTH)

Key Facts: David's great-grandmother, ancestor of Christ ([Ruth 4:13, 21-22](#); [Matthew 1:5](#))

Husbands: Mahlon and Boaz ([Ruth 4:10-13](#))

Son: Obed ([Ruth 4:13, 17](#))

Total Bible References: 13

Key References: [Ruth 1-4](#)

Ruth Speaks

As I sit here watching little Obed play, my thoughts go back to those bittersweet years in Moab. Frankly, I thought my life was over when Mahlon died. How wrong I was! My wonderful life in Israel as the wife of my dear Boaz has all but erased those memories. I knew from the moment I met Boaz that he was a very special man of God. And my life with him has certainly confirmed those first impressions. ([Ruth 1:5](#); [Ruth 2:4-23](#); [Ruth 4:13-17](#))

I wonder what happened to Orpah. Did she ever remarry? Did she return to her gods? I surely hope not. I have longed so often to share my faith in Jehovah God with her. ([Ruth 1:6-14](#))

Obed is becoming stronger and smarter each day. But even more important, he is from the tribe of Judah. Boaz tells me his ancestor Jacob predicted that Israel would one day have kings and that they would come from our tribe. Is it possible that I might become the mother or grandmother or even great-grandmother—of a king? Of such thoughts are dreams made. ([Ruth 4:6-17](#); [Matthew 1:5](#))

Spiritual Lessons from Ruth

- Ruth became a believer during an hour of great sorrow ([Ruth 1:4-5, 16-17](#)). Sometimes adversity is a much more faithful friend than prosperity.
- Our good deeds do not go unnoticed or unrewarded by God. Ruth's wonderful kindness to Naomi ([Ruth 2:11-12](#); [Ruth 4:15](#)) was surpassed by God's wonderful kindness to Ruth. She married the godly Boaz ([Ruth 4:13](#)), became the great-grandmother of King

David ([Ruth 4:18-22](#)), and was included in the genealogy of Christ himself ([Matthew 1:5-6, 16](#)).

Key Verses

"Ruth replied, 'Don't ask me to leave you and turn back. I will go wherever you go and live wherever you live. Your people will be my people, and your God will be my God. I will die where you die and will be buried there. May the LORD punish me severely if I allow anything but death to separate us!' "[\(Ruth 1:16-17\)](#)."