

Ruth

THE BOOK OF RUTH

WHAT'S THIS BOOK ABOUT? The huge impact that loyalty, kindness, and love can have on us and the people around us.

WHO WROTE IT? We don't know, but it was probably written after David became king, since he's mentioned in the last sentence of the book.

WHEN DID IT HAPPEN? Sometime between 1300 and 1100 B.C.

WHERE DOES THIS BOOK FIT? The story of Ruth takes place during the period of the judges.

THE BREAKDOWN

Chapter 1: Naomi, her husband, and their two sons go to Moab because of a famine in Israel. The sons marry local women. After Naomi's husband and both sons die, she decides to return to Israel. Ruth, one of her daughters-in-law, decides to stick with her.

Chapter 2: Ruth and Boaz are attracted to each other.

Chapter 3: Boaz decides to act.

Chapter 4: Boaz marries Ruth. Their great-grandson is David, Israel's greatest king.

KEY CONCEPT In ancient Israel, a family redeemer was a person who was in a position to help a relative who had fallen on hard times. It might involve buying back family land that had been sold to pay debts, or even marrying a relative's widow. Boaz and Naomi were relatives. By marrying Ruth, Boaz was saving, or redeeming, her and her family.

SCORECARD

- Ruth:** A young woman from Moab
- Naomi:** Ruth's mother-in-law
- Boaz:** The man who marries Ruth after her first husband dies

READING TIME



THE MASCULINE PERSPECTIVE

HEROISM. God didn't ask Boaz to be a hero, but just to do what he knew was right. In the same way, God is asking us today to fulfill the responsibilities he has given us. When we do, we can have a huge impact on our immediate families as well as future generations.

WHAT'S THE POINT OF

Ruth?

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God

reverses

tragedy for

his people.

Ruth

2:1

RUTH IS A CAMEO STORY of love, devotion, and redemption set in the black context of the days of the judges. It is the story of a Moabite woman who forsakes her pagan heritage in order to cling to the people of Israel and to the God of Israel. Because of her *faithfulness* in a time of national *faithlessness*, God rewards her by giving her a new husband (Boaz), a son (Obed), and a privileged position in the lineage of David and Christ (she is the great-grandmother of David).

Ruth is the Hebrew title of this book. This name may be a Moabite modification of the Hebrew word *reuit*, meaning "friendship" or "association." The Septuagint entitles the book *Routh*, the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew name. The Latin title is *Ruth*, a transliteration of *Routh*.

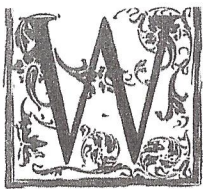
WATCH WORDS

- **people** (a distinctive group or community)—1:16
- **foreigner** (someone with citizenship and loyalty to another country)—2:10
- **close relative** (a blood relative who acts as the family's protector)—4:1 (also 2:20; 3:12)

1:6-22 Here we see the painful beginnings of true spiritual renewal. In choosing to leave Moab, Naomi was turning back toward Israel, seeking help in the direction of the God of her fathers. She accepted the reality of her situation, shown by the fact that she advised her daughters-in-law to return to their families. Naomi knew that she would be unable to support them in the years ahead. But she also knew that in sending them away, she was dismissing her last vestige of support and security. As bleak as the situation was, Naomi was willing to summon the courage to build a new life. Too often our desire for short-term security prevents us from stepping out in faith. We cling to the people and things that help us feel secure. This, however, can keep us from seeking God and surrendering to him. As a result, we often miss God's best for us.

1:16-18 Ruth's desire to remain close to Naomi was actually a step of faith. Naomi had no financial security, no family members nearby for support or protection. By staying with Naomi, Ruth was cutting herself off from her own family, land, and culture. She was essentially committing her life into God's hands. After making her commitment to Naomi, Ruth stood by her, doing all she could to provide food and help for her mother-in-law. Committing ourselves to spiritual renewal is not an easy road. We must realize this before we begin; otherwise, we will be tempted to give up when things get tough. But, as with Ruth, sticking to our commitments will always yield great rewards in the long run.

2:1-3, 18-23 We must never forget that God is in charge of our lives. Ruth was guided by God into Boaz's field, though at the time she was unaware of it. Naomi recognized the fact of God's guidance later on. Throughout this story God was working behind the scenes, whether the people involved recognized it or not. God often works the same way with us. He leads us to meet people and make decisions that make all the difference for us. It is only later that we begin to see how God has been leading us along. Knowing that God works in this way should encourage us as we face the challenges and unknowns in our lives. **2:4-17** This passage beautifully demonstrates God's guidance in the ordinary decisions of life. Naomi and Ruth needed food, so Ruth went in search of it. As she stepped out in faith, persevering in her commitment to Naomi, God provided what she needed—a place to gather grain in an atmosphere of safety and respect (see Philippians 4:19). God led her to the field of Boaz, a man of outstanding character—honest and willing to help others without demanding anything in return. When we experience such fortunate "coincidences" and helpful new relationships in life, we need to take the time to thank God for his provision.



What makes a good movie or novel? What about tragedy, death, loyalty, vivid characters, abiding love, and a happy ending? That's the book of Ruth, the Bible's classic love story, a timeless and true tale of ruin and redemption.

The opening line of Ruth is a snapshot of Israel during the time of the judges: "Now it came to pass, in the days when the judges ruled, that there was a famine in the land" (Ruth 1:1). This famine drove an Israelite family from Bethlehem to the nation of Moab, where the men of the family died. The surviving widow, Naomi, and her daughter-in-law, Ruth, returned bitterly to Bethlehem where God, in His providence, brought a loving man into their life—a wealthy landowner named Boaz, who redeemed and married Ruth.

From start to finish, Ruth's story is about redemption. The Hebrew words for "redeem" and "redemption" occur over twenty times in this book. Boaz became a picture of the redemption

offered by Christ. By her acceptance of Naomi's God, Ruth became a picture of what Paul would teach centuries later: it's not by physical descent from Abraham that one is redeemed, but by the *faith* of Abraham.

Ruth shows us the importance of both human and divine love. This four-chapter book teaches us to trust God who redeems the hardships of our past and who also provides for the needs of the present moment. We can entrust the future results of our day-to-day decisions to Him, who is our Kinsman-Redeemer.



KEY THOUGHT:

In Boaz, God provided Ruth a kinsman-redeemer who exchanged her bitterness for blessing and foreshadowed the redemptive work of the coming Kinsman-Redeemer, Jesus Christ.



KEY VERSE:

"Entreat me not to leave you, *or to* turn back from following after you; for wherever you go, I will go; and wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people *shall be* my people, and your God, my God."

Ruth 1:16



KEY ACTION:

Trust in the God who redeems the hardships of our past, blesses us now, and provides for our future.



KEY PRAYER:

God, I ask You to renew my life and sustain me in old age that I might praise the Lord who has not left me without a Guardian or Redeemer.

3:1-7 Naomi's plan to find a husband for her daughter-in-law may seem a little strange to us. Her plan, however, was based upon a scriptural provision for the protection of widows (Deuteronomy 25:5-10). God had assigned the responsibility of caring for a widow to the dead husband's brothers or near relatives. Since Boaz was a near relative to Ruth's dead husband, he was responsible for helping her. Ruth trusted Naomi's advice and took another courageous step of faith and obedience, following God's plan for rebuilding her life. God provides direction in his Word, but this doesn't mean the fulfillment of his will for our lives is automatic. With faith and obedience we need to use the keys he gives us to bring about his will in our lives.

3:6-14 This passage is one of the great biblical examples of how the truth, clear personal boundaries, and self-respect can protect people who are in a setting of temptation. Both Ruth and Boaz, though in a delicate and compromising situation, chose to do what was right. They refused to yield to the temptation of the moment. They considered the long-term consequences of sexual activity outside the bounds of marriage. Notice how Boaz showed an unselfish concern for Ruth's safety (3:13) and her reputation (3:14).

BASIC SURVEY

RUTH

AUTHOR: Not stated; some suggest Samuel.

DATE: Ruth, as great-grandmother of King David (who reigned approximately 1010–970 BC), probably lived around 1100 BC.

IN TEN WORDS OR LESS

Loyal daughter-in-law pictures God's faithfulness, love, and care.

DETAILS, PLEASE

Ruth, a Gentile woman, marries into a Jewish family. When all the men of the family die, Ruth shows loyalty to her mother-in-law, Naomi, staying with her and scavenging food to keep them alive. As Ruth gleanes barley in a field of the wealthy Boaz, he takes an interest in her and orders his workers to watch over her. Naomi recognizes Boaz as her late husband's relative and encourages Ruth to pursue him as a "kinsman redeemer," one who weds a relative's widow to continue a family line. Boaz marries Ruth, starting a prominent family.

QUOTABLE

> "For wherever you go, I will go; and wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God, my God" (1:16 NKJV).

UNIQUE AND UNUSUAL

Ruth, from the pagan land of Moab, married a Jewish man and became the great-grandmother of Israel's greatest king, David—and an ancestor of Jesus Christ.

SO WHAT?

We can trust God to provide what we need, when we need it—and to work out our lives in ways that are better than we ever imagined.

READ PSALM 68 AND PROVERBS 16.

- One-Month Course: your next reading is on page 49. →
- Three-Month Course: your next reading is on page 49. →
- Six-Month Course: your next reading is on page 47. →

CLOSER LOOK

NAOMI'S TROUBLES



As Naomi was grieving the loss of her husband and sons, she decided to move back to Israel. She is shown with her daughters-in-law in this painting by William Blake (1757–1827) titled *Naomi Entreating Ruth and Orpah to Return to the Land of Moab*.

In the days of the judges there was a long famine in Israel, so Naomi, her husband, and their two sons sold their land, uprooted from Bethlehem, and immigrated to Moab. Their sons married Moabite women; but just when they'd found a little relief and happiness, tragedy struck again: Naomi's husband and both sons died.

Naomi was overwhelmed with grief and financially destitute. Unable to make any sense of her life, she decided to return to Israel. As she was saying

good-bye to her daughters-in-law, she lamented, "Things are far more bitter for me than for you, because the LORD himself has raised his fist against me" (Ruth 1:13 NLT).

Naomi returned to Bethlehem and her old neighbors exclaimed, "Isn't this Naomi?" In despair, she answered, "Don't call me Naomi [pleasant]. . . . Call me Mara [bitter], because the Almighty has made my life very bitter. I went away full, but the LORD has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi? The LORD has afflicted me; the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me" (Ruth 1:20–21 NIV).

But we know the end of her story: Naomi's daughter-in-law, Ruth, who had returned with her, married a wealthy landowner and Naomi was once again happy and provided for. She finally understood that through it all, God had been working out His purposes. Not only did Naomi understand the reason for her suffering, but the best part was that Ruth gave birth to a son who became the ancestor of David, Israel's greatest king.

READ RUTH 1 AND PSALM 113.

- Six-Month Course: your next reading is on page 49. →

HIDDEN TREASURE

RUTH AND THE MOABITES



Ruth left her home in Moab and joined Naomi in travelling to Israel. *Ruth and Boaz* by Gerbrand van den Eeckhout (1621-1674) portrays Boaz as he blesses Ruth for her dedication and loyalty.

The land of Moab bordered Israel, lying to the east of the Dead Sea. The Moabites were also Hebrews; they were descended from Lot, Abraham's nephew (Genesis 19:30-37). The Moabites worshipped a god called Chemosh and throughout their history were sometimes friends and sometimes enemies of God's people. But Ruth, who married Naomi's son, converted to faith in the true God. When Naomi returned to Israel, Ruth went with her, saying, "Wherever you go, I will go; wherever you live, I will live. Your people will be my people, and your God will be my God" (Ruth 1:16 NLT). And Boaz blessed her, saying, "May the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge, reward you fully" (Ruth 2:12 NLT).

READ RUTH 2-3.

HIDDEN TREASURE

THE KINSMAN-REDEEMER

When a poor Israelite was forced to sell his land outside his extended family, a near relative (kinsman) had the obligation to buy back (redeem) that land (Leviticus 25:25-28). Kinsmen were also responsible to marry the widow of a deceased brother and produce an heir for him (Deuteronomy 25:5-10). Since Boaz was a near kinsman of Naomi, he was obliged to redeem her land. He also had the right and duty to marry Ruth, the widow of Naomi's son. Boaz was more than happy to do both. Just like Boaz, Jesus is our kinsman who redeemed us; He did this by paying the price for our sin: "For You [Jesus] were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood" (Revelation 5:9 NKJV).

READ RUTH 4 AND PSALM 146.



Nicolas Poussin (1594-1665) painted *Summer (Ruth and Boaz)*, which illustrates how Boaz redeemed and rescued Ruth.

Someone you
should know

Boaz

The Strength of Kindness

YOU'VE HEARD THE STORY countless times. The rich, older businessman. The gorgeous-but-penniless younger woman. One of two things usually happens: Either the aging tycoon takes what he wants from the young beauty and discards her, or the scheming young gold digger uses all her wiles to extract millions for herself.

Except that it doesn't always happen this way. The story of Boaz and Ruth follows the now-familiar script through the introduction, but then it takes a sharp and refreshing turn.

Boaz and Ruth lived during the time of the judges, an unsettling era for ancient Israel in which lawlessness reigned and relationships between men and women could quickly spiral out of control (see, for example, Judges 19). Ruth had married a young Israelite then living with his parents in her native Moab.

When Ruth's husband died prematurely, her mother-in-law, Naomi, decided to return to Israel. Naomi urged Ruth to stay in her homeland, but Ruth refused, replying with some of the most famous words in the Old Testament: "Don't ask me to leave you and turn back. Wherever you go, I will go; wherever you live, I will live. Your people will be my people, and your God will be my God" (Ruth 1:16).

Yet Ruth's courageous decision to leave for Israel meant almost certain hardship for them both. In that day, unattached females enjoyed almost no legal protection, and a young foreign woman likely would have to endure all kinds of indignity. If some rich or powerful man wanted to take advantage of her, who would stop him?

The great kindness Boaz showed not only changed the spiritual outlook of an elderly woman, it also led to a reward beyond all imagining.

One day the beautiful and vulnerable Ruth wandered into the fields of just such a rich and powerful landowner. The man immediately took notice of her and asked his foreman, "Who is that young woman over there?" (2:5).

Sounds familiar, right? But here the "typical" part of the story ends. Instead of taking advantage of a defenseless young woman, Boaz protected and provided for her. He saw to it that she received kid-glove treatment and even told her that he had warned his men not to bother her (2:9). When Ruth returned home with far more provision than expected and told Naomi that a man named Boaz had helped her, the older woman exclaimed, "May the LORD bless him!" (2:20). Naomi described Boaz as a close relative and declared, "You might be harassed in other fields, but you'll be safe with him" (2:22).

How right she was. Within a few months, God brought Boaz and Ruth together as husband and wife. In time, he blessed the couple with a son named Obed. The boy grew up to father his own son, Jesse, who in turn became the father of King David.

The kindness Boaz showed to a defenseless woman not only changed Naomi's bitter spiritual outlook (2:19-20) but also led to a reward beyond all imagining: Boaz became a direct ancestor of Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world.

THE POINT: God calls powerful men to show powerful kindness.

AN INTRODUCTION TO

RUTH

When her husband died, a young Moabite woman named Ruth chose to travel to Israel with her Jewish mother-in-law, Naomi. Ruth trusted the God of her mother-in-law as the true God. Ruth took care of Naomi and attracted the attention of a good and kind man named Boaz.



THIS MAN SAW RUTH TAKING GRAIN FROM HIS FIELD. WOULD HE BE KIND OR MEAN? SEE RUTH 2.

In It For Me?

RUTH TEACHES ME . . .
TRUE FRIENDS ARE

GOD WHO ANYONE HIM.

LEADS TO

A GOD USES PEOPLE TO TO OTHERS.

GOD COME OUT OF BAD.

FAMILIES ARE TO GOD.

Headlines

DIFFICULT CHOICES

Ruth 1, page 342

WORK ETHIC ATTRACTS BOAZ

Ruth 2, page 343

SANDAL SEALS WEDDING CONTRACT

Ruth 4, page 347

GREAT-GRANDMOTHER TO A KING

Ruth 4, page 347

RUTH DECIDED TO LEAVE MOAB WITH HER MOTHER-IN-LAW AND GO TO ISRAEL AND WORSHIP GOD.



BOAZ WAS A WEALTHY FARMER IN BETHLEHEM.

BOAZ FELL IN LOVE WITH RUTH AND MARRIED HER.

KING DAVID WAS THE GREAT-GRANDSON OF BOAZ AND RUTH.

3:15-18 Earlier Boaz had provided abundantly for the short-term needs of Ruth and Naomi, but now that the harvest was over he gave them additional provisions. Naomi recognized in Boaz's generous gifts a willingness on his part to be responsible for Ruth (and Naomi) according to the stipulations of God's law (Deuteronomy 25:5-10). God provided for Naomi and Ruth through his wise laws and by sending a man who was willing to obey them. God also has given his Word to us for guidance. We need to follow through on his plan if we hope to help others grow spiritually or preserve our own spiritual gains.

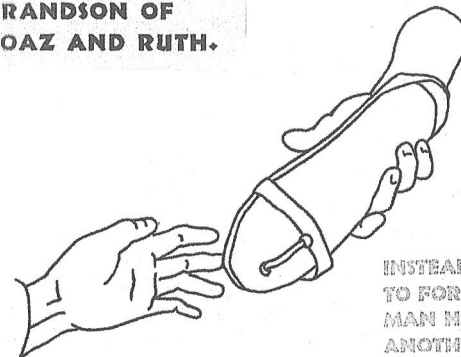
4:1-10 As we watch Boaz negotiate, it is clear that he was a wise and shrewd man. He did not lie or manipulate the circumstances, though he clearly sought a specific outcome. Boaz wisely anticipated the greedy response of Naomi's closer kinsman. This other man wanted the inheritance of Ruth's dead husband but had no desire to care for Ruth or father her children and care for them. When faced with the facts, he saw that the economic advantages of taking Ruth's case were limited—marrying her might even be financially detrimental. He did not want to be held accountable to God's law and the economic loss it might entail. We must be careful not to seek only the advantages in our relationships; we must also accept the responsibilities. Like Boaz, we need to seek what is best for the people close to us.

4:11-17 The story of Ruth and Naomi starts with loneliness and destitution, but it ends happily. Naomi, who had lost her family (1:4-5), had a family once again. Ruth, who had lost her husband and all hope of a prosperous future (1:8-9), was given a husband, a son, and hope for the future. It is interesting to note that Ruth's sacrificial lifestyle brought a new life not only to herself and Naomi but to all of us. Boaz and Ruth's son was named Obed, and he became the ancestor of Jesus Christ, who has provided the means for all of us to be redeemed from sin and receive newness of life.

4:18-22 Hidden in this family tree is powerful evidence that God uses fallible people to bring about his good will. Perez was the first of David's ancestors mentioned; he was the illegitimate son of Judah and his daughter-in-law Tamar (Genesis 38:1-30). Boaz was the son of Salmon, whose wife was Rahab, the prostitute of Jericho (Joshua 2:1-24; Matthew 1:5). Then Ruth was a foreigner from Moab, not even one of God's chosen people. God used these people, far from ideal according to human standards, to bring about the birth of Israel's greatest king, David, and the world's only Savior, Jesus Christ. Knowing this truth should give us hope. No matter how sordid or painful our past, God can use us significantly if we are willing to put ourselves in his hands.

GETTING TO KNOW BOAZ

- How did Boaz find out if Ruth was a good person?
- What did Boaz look for in a wife?
- Think of the people you respect. What character traits do they have in common?
- How can you find out what a person is really like?



INSTEAD OF SIGNING A CONTRACT TO FORMALIZE A COMMITMENT, A MAN HANDED HIS SANDAL TO ANOTHER IN FRONT OF WITNESSES. THIS MADE THE AGREEMENT LEGAL.

LIFE LESSONS: Express your hurt and disappointment to God (1:20-21). God will never leave you (2:20).

What's in a Name?

Naomi requested that she be called Mara, which means "bitter," instead of Naomi, which means "pleasant," because of her suffering at the loss of her husband and sons. Her name remained Naomi, indicating God's continued blessing on her (1:20-22).

RUTH

GOOD FROM BAD

God used a famine in Israel to send Elimelek, Naomi and their sons to Moab to eventually bring Ruth and Naomi back to Israel (1:1-7).

A GOOD MAN

Boaz not only showed favoritism by blessing Ruth; he was already known for his acts of kindness toward others (2:20).

GOOD CHOICES

Because she chose to go with Naomi and move to Israel instead of remaining in Moab, God blessed Ruth. She became the great-grandmother of King David and an ancestor of Joseph, the earthly father of Jesus.

DID YOU KNOW?

► It is traditionally accepted that Boaz was the son of Rahab the prostitute, who saved the Israelite spies when they came to explore the Promised Land (see Matthew 1:5, Joshua 2, 6:22-23).

BY THE NUMBERS

4
CHAPTERS
85
VERSES
2,325
WORDS

LIFE LESSONS: God promises rest and peace for his people, especially those who have struggled and suffered (4:13-15).

HOW WELL DO YOU KNOW RUTH?

RUTH IN REVIEW



TIME TRAVELER

1. Due to a famine in the land, you left Bethlehem with your wife and two sons and went to live in Moab. What is your name?



WHO SAID IT?

7. "I went away full, but the Lord has brought me back empty."



MINUTIAE & MISCELLANY

3. What event was happening when Naomi returned to Bethlehem?

- A. Passover Festival
- B. Festival of Tabernacles
- C. Barley harvest
- D. Full moon celebration



WHO DUNIT?

4. Naomi sold the land that belonged to her husband Elimelek after she moved back to Bethlehem. Who bought it?



MINUTIAE & MISCELLANY

5. After finding Ruth at his feet, Boaz gave her something to take back to Naomi. What did he give her?



HOT SEAT

6. My grandson married a Moabite widow. Who am I?



TIME TRAVELER

7. Your wife decided to leave Naomi and stay in Moab. Who are you?



THEN VS. NOW

8. The night that Ruth met Boaz, she gleaned about an ephah of barley. Approximately how much is that in modern-day measurements?

- A. 15 pounds
- B. 10 pounds
- C. 30 pounds
- D. 16 tons



WHO SAID IT?

9. "May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if even death separates you and me."



"?" CRYPTIC PHRASES

10. When Naomi returned to Bethlehem, she told the people to call her Mara. What does this word mean?



WHO SAID IT?

11. "On the day you buy the land from Naomi, you also acquire Ruth the Moabite, the dead man's widow, in order to maintain the name of the dead with his property."



THEN VS. NOW

12. In our current society, a financial transaction is considered completed with the signing of a contract or sometimes even a simple handshake. What constituted a finalized transaction in the time of Ruth?

ANSWERS:

1. Elimelek (1:1-2) 2. Naomi (1:21) 3. C (1:22) 4. Boaz (4:9) 5. barley (3:7-15) 6. Nahshon (4:20-21) 7. Kilion (1:2,5) 8. A (2:17) 9. Ruth (1:16-17) 10. bitter (1:20) 11. Boaz (4:5) 12. One party took off his sandal and gave it to the other. (4:7)