

INTRODUCTION TO RUTH

1. INTRODUCTION

a. Ruth is a book.

b. Ruth has an author.

- i. Our task is to answer the question, “Why did the author write this?”
- ii. We have understood Ruth when we have discerned what the author intended to communicate and accomplish.
- iii. Ruth has both a human and a divine author who never contradict one another.
- iv. Since Ruth is composed of language, it must follow the rules of the language in which it is written.
- v. The nature of the material under investigation determines the rules by which you interpret it.
- vi. Readers are not free to do or say whatever he or she pleases about the meaning of a text. The style, words chosen, and rules of grammar control interpretation.

c. Ruth was written within a historical context.

- i. Because Ruth was written within a historical context, correct interpretation requires a basic understanding of that context.

d. Ruth is theological in nature.

- i. Ruth is not merely a record of God’s self-revelation in history, Ruth is itself God’s self-revelation.
- ii. *All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.* (2 Timothy 3:16, ESV)

2. CRITICAL ISSUES

a. Author

- i. Unknown
- ii. According to *Baba Bathra* (Babylonian rabbinic tradition), Samuel authored Ruth. Unlikely as Samuel died before David ascended.

b. Date

- i. The events of Ruth occurred within the same time frame as the events of the book of Judges.

- 1. *"In the days when the judges ruled there was a famine in the land, and a man of Bethlehem in Judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons."* (Judges 1:1, ESV)

- ii. Our best approximation for the date of composition ranges from preexilic (as early as the Davidic reign) to postexilic (as late as Ezra's reforms). Various theories are tied to our understanding of the book's purpose.

- iii. Ruth 4:7 suggests the narrator lived sometime after the events recorded.

- 1. *"Now this was the custom in former times in Israel concerning redeeming and exchanging: to confirm a transaction, the one drew off his sandal and gave it to the other, and this was the manner of attesting in Israel."* (Ruth 4:7, ESV)

c. Genre

- i. Ruth is an historical narrative which turns upon several legal and cultural customs.
- ii. The book is written in clear and balanced style containing scenes of intrigue and drama.

d. Canonicity

- i. In English translations of the Bible, Ruth appears after Judges and before 1 & 2 Samuel, deriving from the Septuagint and Vulgate ordering of books which is more or less chronological.¹
- ii. In the Hebrew order, Ruth typically follows Proverbs and precedes Song of Songs in the Writings.²

e. Purpose & Themes

- i. God providentially provides for the family of Elimelech.
- ii. Several scholars identify emptiness & fullness as major themes.³

¹ Tremper Longman and Raymond Dillard, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Michigan: Zondervan, 2007), 144.

² Tremper Longman and Raymond Dillard, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Michigan: Zondervan, 2007), 144.

³ Both Leland Ryken (*Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*) and D.F. Rauber (*Literary Values in the Bible: The Book of Ruth*, in *JBL* 89)

- iii. “The book of Ruth is a story of tragedy and triumph, of death and love. The narrative is unified by the motif of a quest for home...”⁴
- iv. Some have posited a political purpose, that of demonstrating the validity of David’s rule by appealing to the Lord’s guidance of his ancestors.⁵

f. Theological Message

- i. At first glance, we might wonder at Ruth’s theological content. The book contains no miracles or supernatural acts of God. There are no expositions of doctrine. The narrative is short and bends more toward the ethical than the theological. Images of economic devastation, personal loss, loyalty, and new beginnings fill the pages.
- ii. Beneath it all, is the providential and guiding hand of God, and the ordinary ways in which his providence works. Ruth doesn’t just “happen” to work in the field of Boaz by blind chance. (Ruth 2:3) The author leads us to assume she has been placed there by the hand of the Lord.
- iii. Within Ruth, the prologue and genealogical conclusion guide our reading.
 - 1. Prologue: The book occurs within the time of the Judges. Contrasting with Judges, Ruth highlights the moral strength and resolve of the main characters.⁶ We’re reminded that even in a time of apostasy among God’s people, the Lord still redeems the nations.
 - 2. Genealogical Conclusion: The final word in our English translations is “David.” Though God has, as it were, been silent both in Ruth’s devastation and renewal, we discern his sovereignty and purpose which will establish the Davidic throne, and throne which will never end.
- iv. Expanding our perspective to include the New Testament, Matthew’s genealogy connects Ruth to the Messiah, Jesus Christ. She is one of four women named in the lineage of Jesus Christ (Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Mary). All were looked down upon, yet God used them each to advance the line of the Redeemer.

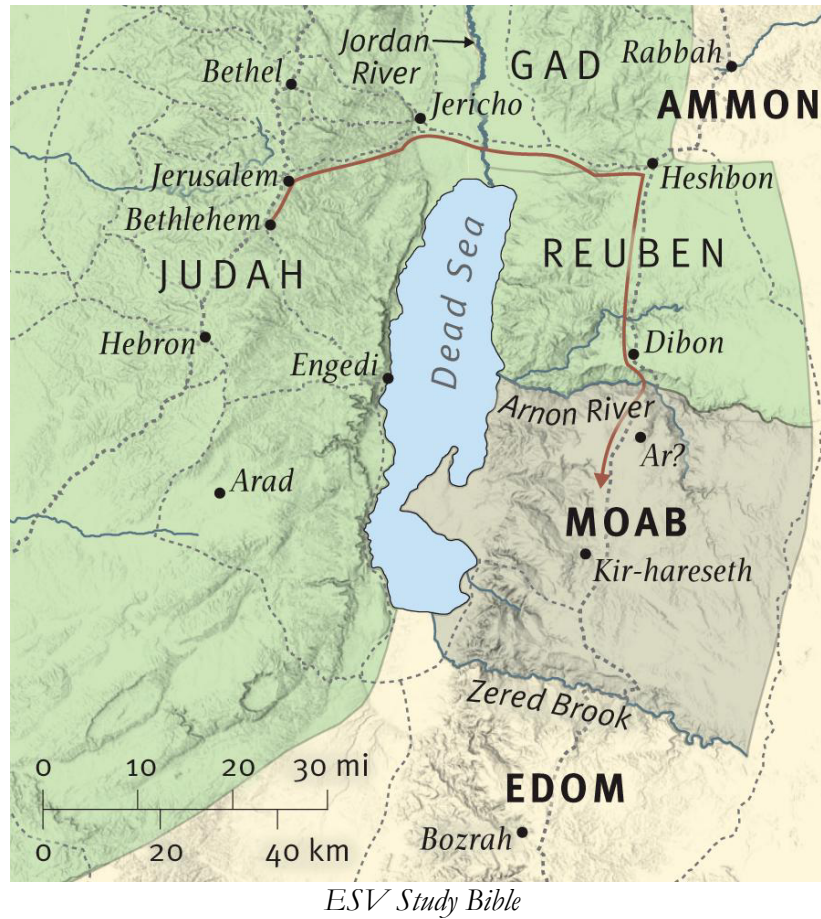
3. Atlas, Charts, Timelines

⁴ Leland Ryken, James Wilhoit, and Tremper Longman, eds., *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 745.

⁵ Tremper Longman and Raymond Dillard, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Michigan: Zondervan, 2007), 147.

⁶ Tremper Longman and Raymond Dillard, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Michigan: Zondervan, 2007), 144.

a. Atlas/Images



Naomi & Ruth Return from Moab to Bethlehem
Moody Bible Atlas

b. Sequence of Events

- i. Elimelech, Naomi, & sons leave Bethlehem for Moab due to famine.
- ii. Elimelech dies. Ten years later the sons, Mahlon & Chilion, die leaving Naomi & two Moabite wives, Ruth & Orpah behind.
- iii. Bereft of family, Naomi learns the famine is over and decides to return to Bethlehem. Orpah stays behind, but Ruth follows Naomi, embracing the Lord as her God. (Ruth 1)
- iv. Ruth gleanes in a field belonging to a relative of Elimelech named Boaz. (Ruth 2:1-23)
- v. Ruth, guided by Naomi, plans a nighttime encounter with Boaz, asking him to marry her as he is an eligible kinsman-redeemer. (Ruth 3:1-18)
- vi. Boaz marries Ruth, redeems the family property and they bear a son, Obed, who becomes the grandfather of King David. (Ruth 4:1-122)

4. OUTLINES OF RUTH

a. ESV STUDY BIBLE

- I. Introduction: Naomi Bereft of Family (1:1–5)
- II. Scene 1: Naomi Returns to Bethlehem with Ruth (1:6–22)
- III. Scene 2: Ruth Gleans in Boaz’s Field (2:1–23)
- IV. Scene 3: Ruth, at the Threshing Floor, Asks Boaz to Marry Her (3:1–18)
- V. Scene 4: Boaz Arranges Redemption at the Gate (4:1–12)
- VI. Conclusion: Naomi Blessed with a New Family (4:13–17)
- VII. Genealogy: Extended Blessing (4:18–22)

b. CSB Study Bible

- I. Scene 1: Moab (1:1–22)
 - A. Elimelech’s departure (1:1–5)
 - B. Naomi’s despair (1:6–13)
 - C. Ruth’s decision (1:14–22)
- II. Scene 2: Fields of Bethlehem (2:1–23)
 - A. Ruth meets Boaz (2:1–14)
 - B. Boaz provides for Ruth and Naomi (2:15–23)
- III. Scene 3: Boaz’s Threshing Floor (3:1–18)
 - A. Boaz’s desire to marry Ruth (3:1–11)
 - B. Marriage delayed (3:12–18)
- IV. Scene 4: City of Bethlehem (4:1–22)
 - A. Boaz marries Ruth (4:1–12)
 - B. Ruth gives birth to Obed (4:13–15)
 - C. Naomi is blessed with a new family (4:16)
 - D. Ruth is an ancestor of David (4:17–22)

5. BIBLIOGRAPHY

Beitzel, Barry J. *The Moody Bible Atlas*. Moody Publishers, 2025.

Brand, Chad, Eric Alan Mitchell, Steve Bonds, E Ray Clendenen, Trent C Butler, and Bill Latta. *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*. Nashville, Tn: Holman Reference, 2015.

CSB Study Bible, Hardcover. B&H Publishing Group, 2017.

Cundall, Arthur E., and Leon Morris. *Judges: An Introduction and Commentary: An Introduction and Commentary*. Downers Grove, IL: Inter-varsity press, 1968.

ESV Study Bible : English Standard Version. Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Bibles, 2008.

Longman, Tremper, and Raymond Dillard. *An Introduction to the Old Testament*. Michigan: Zondervan, 2007.

Ryken, Leland, James Wilhoit, and Tremper Longman, eds. *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000.