

RUTH

“Friend”

“Ruth, which is appended to Judges in some Hebrew listings of the Old Testament, is a notable exception to the gloomy days of the judges. Hers is a story of loyalty in a day of anarchy, an example of purity in a time of immorality. In Ruth the narrative moves from the battlefield to the harvest field and from the warrior’s cry to the gleaner’s song. Ruth is a lily in the mud pond of Judges.” NLG/*APSOT*

I. Historical Background

- A. Perhaps took place during the judgeship of Gideon, 1130 BC, when there was famine (Ruth 1:1,6; Jdg. 6:1) before deliverance from the Midianites. Josephus (*Antiquities* 5:9:1) places her as still living in the days of Eli.

Judges 6:6 So Israel was greatly impoverished (just before the days of Gideon) because of the Midianites, and the children of Israel cried out to the LORD.

- B. Religious: Part of the “Megilloth” (5 smaller books read at 5 Jewish festivals), Ruth has been read at every Pentecost feast because of the place of the harvest in the book

II. Authorship

A. Critical view: Post-exilic provenance

1. Principally supposed due to presence of Aramaisms, a stock objection that is now discredited
2. Lost ancient practices, e.g., 4:7 shoe ceremony at the gate, and changes in levirate laws (cf. Dt. 25:9). Hubbard, however, believes that the book’s close, yet dissimilar, parallels to ancient practice is explained by unwritten *goel* custom and not controlled by levirate practice (p. 27).
3. Reading between the lines as they do, the purpose of the book for the critics yields a corroborating argument: the book was written as a polemic against Ezra and Nehemiah’s ban against intermarriage with foreigners (!)

B. Conservative

1. Pre-exilic, in the era of Josiah or Hezekiah

Hezekiah and Josiah are likened unto David as pleasing to God (cf. II Kgs 18:3; II Kgs 22:2), and they made attempts to shepherd the northern tribes.

2. Perhaps **Samuel** recorded the story of Ruth before the reign of David
 - a. Babylonian Talmud, Babha Bathra 14b-15a: “Samuel wrote the book which bears his name and the Book of Judges and Ruth.”
 - b. David is mentioned in her lineage (4:17,22), but not Solomon who reigns after Samuel’s death.
 - c. Contrary to the Samuel suggestion are these arguments:
 - (1) Chronological references of 1:1 and 4:7 pose a setting of a by-gone era
 - (2) The genealogy (4:17, 18-22) presupposes that David is already well known. Samuel is dead at David’s coronation.

3. R.L. Hubbard in the *NICOT on Ruth* offers the reasonable suggestion that Ruth is written during the reign of David in Jerusalem as an apology for his dynasty over against Saul’s
 - a. Ruth is a founding mother like Rachel and Leah (4:11,12) at a key point in Israel’s history
 - (1) Thus the message for the contemporary audience is tied into the patriarchal history earlier than Ruth’s
 - (2) Further, the reference to the patriarchs appeals to the whole nation of Israel (viz., Northern Kingdom) beyond the appeal just to Judah
 - b. “In sum, the book has a political purpose: to win popular acceptance of David’s rule by appeal to the continuity of Yahweh’s guidance in the lives of Israel’s ancestors and David. In essence, it says, ‘If the same divine providence which guided Israel’s ancestors also guided David, Yahweh has indeed appointed him king.’ Further, given the alien presence under David’s rule, the book adds that foreigners who, like Ruth, truly seek refuge under Yahweh’s wings (2:12) are welcome.” —p. 42

4. Hubbard does not rule out the possibility that the book was penned by a woman. Perspective of a female author is perhaps shown by
 - a. Focus on two women in desperate straits
 - b. Success of the story’s outcome is dependent upon female initiative

III. Purpose

A. Ultimately, to **show the ways of God in human life** (e.g., 2:3) = **Providence**

Ruth 2:3 And she happened (literally, “her chance chanced upon”) to come to the part of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the family of Elimelech.

1. Encourage piety before God and faithfulness (*chesed* חֶסֶד) to one another in the covt community despite the unsettled times.
 - a. Keep in mind that Ruth’s name means “friend.”
 - b. There are interesting parallels to the purpose and language of the book of Job: Naomi believes the Almighty is punishing her (Job 27:2), whereas He is testing her and is setting the stage for a day of reward and blessing for faithfulness (modeled by Ruth).
Naomi’s calling herself Mara is a “...mistake that many loyal but hurting believers have committed: interpreting and trying to figure out God in the light of our circumstances, rather than interpreting and trying to figure out our circumstances in the light of God and His character” (Hamilton, *Handbook*..., pp. 192-193)
2. Trace the Messianic lineage growing out of the promise made to the patriarchs
3. Show that God’s purposes still open to the Gentiles.
 - a. Boaz may have remembered that he was descended from a Gentile, Tamar (4:12), by his ancestor Judah. This fact is subtly implied in the genealogy which does not begin with Judah, but with his son, Perez (4:12). Matthew 1:5 deliberately identifies the “parents” of Boaz as Salmon and Rahab.
 - b. Also, follow God’s favorable dealings with Ruth, from proselyte Moabitess —> maidservant (2:16) —> marriageable female (3:9) —> woman (4:11) —> mother in Israel (4:11).

B. Canonically

1. The **Bethlehem Trilogy**

Joshua/Judges carries on the unbroken chronology of God’s chosen people, flowing into the narrative of the times of the monarchy. Are there other reasons to place Ruth after Judges, besides fitting it into its historical context? For that matter, what makes this book sacred history, i.e., canonical?

Ruth is more than a *novella* (per Gunkel), an Italian genre that is strong on character development through dialogue and the outworking of the plot. Nor is it merely an *idyll*, a genre that treats “simple, peasant family relationships and lacked evil characters” for the sake of entertainment (Hubbard, p. 47).

Ruth is the happy ending (Hubbard likes the genre of “short story”) to the “**Bethlehem Trilogy**” which includes

- 1] the Levite from Bethlehem (Jdg. 17,18),
- 2] the concubine from Bethlehem (Jdg.19-21), and
- 3] Ruth.

See Merrill's insightful development, pp. 178-188.

In each narrative, a man leaves Bethlehem; the behavior of the first two reflects poorly on Bethlehem, while Elimelech's will magnify the position of Bethlehem. In the second, the brutal behavior of Benjamites disgraces a Bethlehemite; "but Bethlehem not only survived, it went on to produce Saul's successor, the man after God's own heart." —Merrill, p. 182

Plus, the Ephraim host in Gibeon is called a sojourner (Judg 19.6) even as Ruth is (Ruth 2.10)

The proximate inter-connection of these three narratives in the Bethlehem Trilogy suggests one more reason, (a canonical one), why these two early events in the period are appended to the end of the Book of Judges, i.e., so that they literarily flow into the story of Ruth which flows into the introduction of the Messianic dynasty of David, (viz., the Book of Samuel). See the R.L. Harris handout from *ZPBE* to note how these early Narrative Books are connected.

Merrill summarizes that the events of the trilogy are included to trace the roots of the Davidic dynasty and justify its existence in opposition to Saul, p. 179.

The second narrative in particular develops the contrast with Saul's lineage with its negative reference to the disobedience of Jabesh-Gilead. From this city most likely came one of Saul's matriarchal forbearers, as evinced by

- 1] later Benjamites like Saul descended through the daughters of Shiloh or Jabesh-Gilead;
- 2] Saul's interest in the plight of besieged Jabesh-Gilead in the Trans-Jordan, I Sam. 11:1ff.; and
- 3] Jabesh-Gilead's interest in giving Saul a decent burial, 31:11-13.

Although Ruth is not positioned directly after Judges in the Hebrew Bible handed down to us, the LXX/Vulgate tradition which our modern English Bible has followed apparently preserves an older Hebrew tradition (note Josephus' canon), viz., that Judges and Ruth originally were one book. The suggestion is that Ruth may have been the final of three (?) appendices to Judges. This would have implications for the dating of Ruth, also.

Older Hebrew canons put Ruth just before Psalms as an intro to David's Book. The modern Hebrew canon places Ruth after the virtuous woman (Ruth 3:11) of Proverbs 31.

2. Canonical continuity with the Abrahamic covt

OR, "Setting the Stage for the Davidic Covt"

- a. First mention (4:11) of the dual name, Bethlehem Ephratah, since the days of the patriarchs
 - (1) Bethlehem has been named in Joshua and Judges
 - (2) Significantly, the antecedent to the dual use of the name is Gen. 35:16-19 when the birth of the first Benjamite caused the death of Israel's favorite wife. Will God bring happiness out of the sad memory which this location evokes by

- (a) making it the site of new life for the nation
 - (b) through the seed of another favored woman (cf. Ruth 4:11; cf. Gen. 3:15)
 - (c) against the backdrop of the trouble that Benjamin (or his son, Saul) brings?
- (3) Next mention of dual name of Bethlehem is Micah 5:2, a Messianic reference
- b. Similarities between Ruth and Tamar (Gen. 38), 4:12,18, q.v.
(See Hamilton's comparison chart, pp. 200-01.)
- (1) Both are foreigners, unlikely channels of Messianic blessing
 - (2) Both go for "older men"
 - (3) Both use stealth to approach their targets, albeit, with diverse motives and methods
 - (4) Both stand before the elders to decide their fate
 - (5) Both, of course, are in the Davidic/Messianic line. The Book of Ruth brings the contemporary audience up to date on the outworking of Israel's prophetic blessing for Judah, Gen. 49:10.
- c. Genealogical circumvention, OR "God's ways are not our ways" (Isa 55:8,9)

The focus on Ruth and Boaz's family connections (both ancestry and posterity) reveals an emphasis on Judean lineage; obscure Boaz is tied into the patriarch Judah through the latter's illegitimate son, Perez. Significantly, this account reveals no relation to the more glorious and recent formative history of the nation, the Exodus and Sinaitic covenant. The purpose is to leap-frog back to the promise of future kings made to Abraham (Gen. 17:6,16), the father of the faithful, worked out through his not so noble descendent Judah, Gen. 49:10; ch. 38. "A major purpose of Ruth is to establish this very continuity, at least between Abraham and David."
— Merrill, p. 187

- (1) Perez makes a "breach" (*peres*), Gen. 38:29, circumventing human conventions of birthright. His brother had appeared first.
- (2) Boaz is not the likely choice for the royal line, as he himself is the descendent of a Canaanite harlot, Rahab. Like the listing of the pedigree in Ruth, Matthew's genealogy (1:5) also plays on this idea of irony in order to emphasize the grace of God.
- (3) David is in the proper bloodline, but he is too far down the family totem pole of brothers to have been first choice (1 Sam. 16:10). But he is God's first choice as a man after God's heart.

1 Samuel 16:7 But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, because I have refused him. For the LORD does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."

(4) Solomon was an unlikely successor to his father.

(a) Bathsheba's marriage to David was not under the best circumstances

(b) He was not the surviving first born of David, nor the eldest of Bathsheba's four sons (I Chron. 3:5).

(c) Merrill conjectures that Bathsheba was also a Gentile Hittite, probably because the three other women mentioned by Matthew's genealogy are outside the covt community; but her father is Ammiel (I Chron 3:5).

i) If she were Hittite, she would carry the cursed blood of Canaan (Gen. 10:15), as well as the Indo-European blood of Japheth. Were this the case, of interest would be God's overcoming power in the outworking of Gen. 3:15 through the seed of these daughters of Eve from the lines of all three of the sons of Noah. It represents a broadening of the offer of the re-creation blessing to all nations

ii) This line of thought might lead one to date the book in the early life (or reign?) of Solomon, since there are parallels between his mother and this godly ancestress of David.

(5) Separation by, and reunion through, a woman and a stranger (Gentile)

(a) Lot was estranged from the household of promise; mischief befell him in the incestuous birth of Moab by his eldest daughter, Gen. 19:37

(b) Judah departed from his family to live among the Canaanites, Gen. 38; trouble befell his sons and mischief befell him in the incestuous birth of his son, Perez, by the Canaanite, Tamar

(c) Elimelech departed from his clan; death again follows, as well as two more daughters of Lot being left without husbands

*(d) Summary: the ultimate separation was the original breach in paradise. This appears to have come by a woman (Eve) taking matters into her own hands. This downward pattern continues in the lives of other women (Lot's daughters, Tamar) who, not trusting providence, take matters into their own hands; all the while, God is overruling and working out the promised restoration (Gen. 3:15) to overcome the breach precipitated by these women. Naomi and Ruth are included in His plan of using helpless and unexpected vessels, who, in this case, are models of covt faithfulness (Ruth 1:16,17). Ruth is God's "instrument to bridge the chasm between Judah and Moab, a type or paradigm of reconciliation which God desires among nations, reconciliation which will fulfill the patriarchal blessing." —Merrill, p. 188.

It is apparent that a lot of meaning is found in the genealogy (!) at the end of Ruth. The book is an explanation/apology for God's ways in choosing His vessels of blessing in the progress of history toward redemption.

In this 10 generation list, Boaz and David occupy the significant 7th and 10th positions.

IV. Outline (following NLG/APSOT) and highlights

Ruth	
1.	Renouncing
2.	Requiting
3.	Reaping
4.	Rejoicing

A. Love's **R**esolve: Deciding as a faithful daughter — 1

1. Note that the covenantal bond of marriage that had linked Ruth to Naomi (1:16,17) is quite parallel to the divine covenant that binds God's people to Himself: Hosea 2:16-23, Malachi 2:14, Prov. 2:17

Ruth 1:16,17 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. 17 Where you die, I will die, And there will I be buried. The LORD do so to me, and more also, If anything but death parts you and me."

- Hos. 2:19 "I will betroth you to Me forever; Yes, I will betroth you to Me In righteousness and justice, In lovingkindness and mercy; 20 I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness, And you shall know the LORD.
- Mal. 2:14 she is your companion And your wife by covenant.
- Prov. 2:17 Who forsakes the companion of her youth, And forgets the covenant of her God.

1:14: "Ruth clave to Naomi:" The word "cleave" in the OT usually refers to man's clinging to God. Of the eight times it is used to speak of person clinging to person, four of these instances are in Ruth and another is Gen. 2:24.

2. Impoverished, Elimelech and Naomi were forced to sell the family estate

B. Love's **R**esponse: Serving as a gleaner — 2

Ruth 2:12 "The LORD repay your work, and a full reward be given you by the LORD God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge."

3:9 "I am Ruth, your maidservant. Take your maidservant under your wing, for you are a close relative."

Ezk. 16:8 "When I passed by you again and looked upon you, indeed your time was the time of love; so I spread My wing over you and covered your nakedness. Yes, I swore an oath to you and entered into a covenant with you, and you became Mine," says the Lord GOD.

2:12c cf. 3:9c = same word for "wings;" the Lord "...acts in the acts of *hesed* done by human characters." "In such conduct, His will is 'done on earth as it is in heaven'" —Hubbard, pp. 71,72

See Hubbard's Introductory section on Themes and Theology for an excellent development of \aleph *chesed* in the Book of Ruth.

C. Love's **R**est: Resting at the threshing floor — 3

See the theme of "rest/peace" brought forward in vss 1 & 18

3:4 — this word for “**uncovered**” in the Bible primarily has sensual connotations, as in Lev. 18 & 20 for uncovering the nakedness of someone.

Hubbard paints a fuller picture of this scene with a “...smiling Boaz lounging on the [threshing] floor, staring at the stars, and savoring the quiet euphoria of the good life. In such a [mellow mood], he just might be vulnerable to suggestion.” Yet he and Ruth both display the inner character of fidelity and integrity before God and one another, *chesed*, in this “crucible of temptation,” whereas their forbearers went looking for temptation to fall into. —Hubbard, *NICOT*, pp. 208-09

D. Loves **Reward**: Recognition as wife and mother — 4

The **Kinsman-Redeemer** of 3:9; 4:1,3,14.

This is the same term, *goel*, as is found in Job 19:25 for “Redeemer” and in Numbers 35:12-19 for the family “avenger/redeemer” of blood.

When circumstances forced an Israelite to sell off family property or even to indenture himself, the destitute person looked to his next of kin to get him out of hock, thus keeping the property in that line of the family.

A related condition was that, if one branch of the family died off without any male heir, then the remaining widow(s) looked to a relative of the husband to raise up offspring in the original husband’s name.

Boaz was not the closest kinsman to Naomi (by her deceased husband Elimelech). The closest relative had first opportunity to fulfill the role of a redeemer in regaining the family property and in performing Levirate (Lat. for “husband’s brother”) responsibilities (Dt 25:5-10; cf. Gen. 38 in the case of Tamar and the three brothers).

Ruth’s closest relative by her husband Mahlon refused to take Ruth as a wife and thus give Mahlon any children (4:6), although he was interested in redeeming the family’s property so that he might make use of it. He would have had to invest a portion of his own estate in procuring Elimelech/Mahlon’s land. Any heirs by Ruth would have inherited the property in Mahlon’s name, and his own heirs would have been in jeopardy of losing the part of their own father’s estate/money that was invested in Mahlon’s property in redeeming it. (Lev. 25:6 says that the first son by the Levirate father is legally the son/heir of the deceased.)

The **removing of the shoe** in this incident has an interesting background, probably related to the law of Halitzah, Dt. 25:7-10, when a man refused to fulfill his obligation of Levirate marriage.

First, the wearing of shoes distinguished the financially secure from the poor, and sons from slaves who were often shoeless (Amos 2:6; 8:6). Compare the prodigal son whose father immediately put shoes on his son to restore him (Lk. 15:22).

Second, deliberately stepping on a piece of land was a sign of claiming it (cf. Abraham in Gen. 13:17; also Josh. 1:3), while removing the sandal was a public and legal sign of quit-claim and transference. This seems to be what is taking place in Ruth 4:7,8.

Finally, there may be some relation of this Halitzah Ceremony to Ruth's strange action of lying at the feet of Boaz. Besides this being a physically evocative gesture, she may be reminding him, at Naomi's request, of his responsibility as a kinsman-redeemer to fulfill his obligation to marry her if the nearer kinsman would not.

The Kinsman-Redeemer (cf. Job 19:35) is a beautiful symbol of the role the **Messiah** worked out in

- 1) interceding for His family when nobody else could;
- 2) restoring our lost possessions; and
- 3) taking us as His bride when we were destitute.
- 4) Cost him a great price