

## Introduction

### Background of Ruth

**Writing:** Ruth is an anonymous book, but Rabbinic tradition claimed that it was written by **Samuel** (Leon Morris, 1968). First-century Jewish historian Josephus lists only **22 OT books** (*Against Apion*, 1.8). Judges and Ruth were generally considered one book (also 1-2 Samuel, 1-2 Kings, 1-2 Chronicles, Ezra-Nehemiah, Jeremiah-Lamentations, 12 minor prophets).

**Date:** Ruth was written during or after the lifetime of David. He is mentioned in the closing genealogies of Ruth ([Ruth 4:17, 22](#)).

**Purpose:** The **biblical-historical** purpose of Ruth is to prepare the way for **David** (much like Judges). The genealogy list at the end of the book trace from Judah's son to David, through Boaz. This points to the David, the descendent of Judah and ancestor of Jesus (see [Matt 1:1-17](#)). The **theological** purpose of the book is to explain the concept of **redemption**. It is significant that a descendant of Judah redeemed a Moabite. This illustrates the teaching of the OT that the Messiah would redeem all nations.

### Preview

As you read through Ruth, ask yourself the following questions. (1) *How does this prepare the way for David, the ancestor of Christ?* (2) *What does this teach about redemption?*

## Naomi and Ruth

### Elimelech

[Ruth 1:1-2](#) “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. 2 The name of the man was Elimelech and the name of his wife Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah. They went into the country of Moab and remained there.”

*What two details in verse 1 indicate when this story begins?* The events of Ruth were in the days of the **judges**. The story begins during a **famine** in Judah. “Land” may refer to all of Israel. A **nation-wide famine** would better account for Elimelech going to another nation, rather than another region of Israel.

*Where was Elimelech's hometown?* He was from **Bethlehem of Judah**. There was another town in Zebulun called Bethlehem ([Josh 19:15](#)). Bethlehem of Judah was the most well-known. [Ruth 1:2](#) calls them **Ephrathites**. Ephrathah was an earlier name of Bethlehem ([Gen](#)

[35:19](#); [48:7](#)). This detail is important for establishing that Elimelech was from the tribe of Judah.

*Where did Elimelech take his family?* They sojourned (temporary home) in Moab. Moab and Ben-Ammi (Ammon) were sons of Lot ([Gen 19:36-38](#)).

[Ruth 1:3-5](#) “3 But Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died, and she was left with her two sons. 4 These took Moabite wives; the name of the one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth. They lived there about ten years, 5 and both Mahlon and Chilion died, so that the woman was left without her two sons and her husband.”

*Who did Elimelech and Naomi’s sons marry?* They married Moabite women, Orpah and Ruth. Elimelech and his two sons, Mahlon and Chilion, died, leaving behind 3 widows. As the last chapter indicates, David will be one of Ruth’s descendents. When David was hiding from Saul, he entrusted the Moabites with protecting his parents. [1 Samuel 22:3-4](#) “3 And David went from there to Mizpeh of Moab. And he said to the king of Moab, “Please let my father and my mother stay with you, till I know what God will do for me.” 4 And he left them with the king of Moab, and they stayed with him all the time that David was in the stronghold.” Perhaps David’s connection to Moab through Ruth established that relationship.

### Naomi returns home

[Ruth 1:6-7](#) “6 Then she arose with her daughters-in-law to return from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the fields of Moab that the Lord had visited his people and given them food. 7 So she set out from the place where she was with her two daughters-in-law, and they went on the way to return to the land of Judah.”

*Why did Naomi decide to return to Judah?* She heard in the fields of Moab that the famine in Judah had ended. So, she began to return to Judah with her two daughters-in-law.

[Ruth 1:8-10](#) “8 But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, “Go, return each of you to her mother’s house. May the Lord deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me. 9 The Lord grant that you may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband!” Then she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept. 10 And they said to her, “No, we will return with you to your people.””

*How did the daughters-in-law respond when Naomi told them to return to their mothers’ homes?* They wept and they insisted on going with Naomi. Notice that they refer to Judah as “your people” ([Ruth 1:10](#)). Just as Naomi is a sojourner in Moab; they will be sojourners in Judah.

[Ruth 1:11-14](#) “11 But Naomi said, “Turn back, my daughters; why will you go with me? Have I yet sons in my womb that they may become your husbands? 12 Turn back, my daughters; go your way, for I am too old to have a husband. If I should say I have hope, even if I should have a husband this night and should bear sons, 13 would you therefore wait till they were grown?”

Would you therefore refrain from marrying? No, my daughters, for it is exceedingly bitter to me for your sake that the hand of the Lord has gone out against me.” 14 Then they lifted up their voices and wept again. And Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her.”

*Why does Naomi say the women should not stay with her?* Naomi does not expect to remarry because she is too old. Life was hard for widows. Scripture commands God’s people to care for widows, orphans, and strangers (or foreigners). These groups were largely dependent on community support. Naomi points out that, even if she remarries, it would be unreasonable for Orpah and Ruth to wait for her sons to grow.

### Ruth stays with Naomi

[Ruth 1:15–18](#) “15 And she said, “See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law.” 16 But Ruth said, “Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For where you go I will go, and where 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. May the Lord do so to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you.” 18 And when Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more.”

*To whom/what did Orpah return?* She returned to her people (Moabites) and her gods (Chemosh). This contrasts with Naomi who is from Judah and worships the Lord (Yahweh).

*What does Ruth say about Naomi’s people and God?* Ruth commits that the Judahites would be her people and the Lord (Yahweh) would be her God. She also commits to stay with Naomi until death. This passage does not indicate that Ruth had faith in the Lord. However, she was willing to forsake her own people and gods to commit to Naomi’s people and God.

### Return to Bethlehem

[Ruth 1:19–22](#) “19 So the two of them went on until they came to Bethlehem. And when they came to Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them. And the women said, “Is this Naomi?” 20 She said to them, “Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. 21 I went away full, and the Lord has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi, when the Lord has testified against me and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me?” 22 So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabite her daughter-in-law with her, who returned from the country of Moab. And they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest.”

*In what town did Naomi and Ruth settle?* They returned to Bethlehem. This is where Elimelech and Naomi lived before staying in Moab. Remember, Ruth is an ancestor of David. David was living in Bethlehem (with his family) when Samuel anointed him as king ([1 Sam 16:4-13](#)). Luke refers to Bethlehem as “the city of David” ([Luke 2:4](#)). Micah prophesied that the Messiah would come from Bethlehem ([Mic 5:2](#); cf. [Matt 2:5-6](#); [John 7:42](#)).

*What does Naomi say people should call her?* She said her name should not be Naomi, which means pleasant or sweet. Her name should be Mara, which means bitter. The Lord has given her suffering, not blessing. We will read at the end of the book that all of this is God's plan for Naomi's blessing.

*When did Naomi and Ruth arrive at Bethlehem?* They arrived at the beginning of the barley harvest. As we will read, this is God's timing for providing food and a family for Ruth and Naomi.

## Ruth meets Boaz

### Ruth gathers grain

[Ruth 2:1-3](#) “1 Now Naomi had a relative of her husband's, a worthy man of the clan of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz. 2 And Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, “Let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain after him in whose sight I shall find favor.” And she said to her, “Go, my daughter.” 3 So she set out and went and gleaned in the field after the reapers, and she happened to come to the part of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the clan of Elimelech.”

*How did Ruth provide food for Naomi and herself?* Naomi gathered grain from fields behind the reapers. Whatever the reapers did not collect, she could keep. This was God's plan for providing for the poor. [Leviticus 19:9-10](#) “9 “When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge, neither shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. 10 And you shall not strip your vineyard bare, neither shall you gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard. You shall leave them for the **poor** and for the **sojourner**: I am the Lord your God” (cf. [Lev 23:22](#)). [Deuteronomy 24:19-21](#) “19 “When you reap your harvest in your field and forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it. It shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the **widow**, that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands. 20 When you beat your olive trees, you shall not go over them again. It shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the **widow**. 21 When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, you shall not strip it afterward. It shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the **widow**.”

[Ruth 2:4-7](#) “4 And behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem. And he said to the reapers, “The Lord be with you!” And they answered, “The Lord bless you.” 5 Then Boaz said to his young man who was in charge of the reapers, “Whose young woman is this?” 6 And the servant who was in charge of the reapers answered, “She is the young Moabite woman, who came back with Naomi from the country of Moab. 7 She said, ‘Please let me glean and gather among the sheaves after the reapers.’ So she came, and she has continued from early morning until now, except for a short rest.””

*What information does the servant give Boaz about Ruth?* She is a Moabite. She came with Naomi when she returned to Bethlehem. She requested permission to gather the grain. She has been working all day.

### Boaz provides for Ruth

[Ruth 2:8–9](#) “8 Then Boaz said to Ruth, “Now, listen, my daughter, do not go to glean in another field or leave this one, but keep close to my young women. 9 Let your eyes be on the field that they are reaping, and go after them. Have I not charged the young men not to touch you? And when you are thirsty, go to the vessels and drink what the young men have drawn.””

*What request does Boaz make of Ruth?* He instructs her to stay in his field. He offers her two things while she collects the grain. First, he offers her protection. Ruth has no one to defend her. There are no men in her household. She may not be protected in other fields, but she is protected here. Second, he offers her water. This means that she can work all day without leaving to draw water herself.

[Ruth 2:10–13](#) “10 Then she fell on her face, bowing to the ground, and said to him, “Why have I found favor in your eyes, that you should take notice of me, since I am a foreigner?” 11 But Boaz answered her, “All that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband has been fully told to me, and how you left your father and mother and your native land and came to a people that you did not know before. 12 The Lord repay you for what you have done, and a full reward be given you by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge!” 13 Then she said, “I have found favor in your eyes, my lord, for you have comforted me and spoken kindly to your servant, though I am not one of your servants.””

*In verse 10, what does Ruth acknowledge about herself?* She is a foreigner. **If** Boaz is faithful to the commands about leaving the edges unharvested, the protection and water are still going beyond that command. It is not, however, going beyond the command of [Leviticus 19:18](#) “... you shall love your neighbor as yourself ...”

Notice that Boaz already knows Ruth’s history (everything from [Ruth 1](#)). Ruth’s decision to leave Moab and come to Bethlehem are framed as kindness toward Naomi. If Ruth had remained in Moab, she would have lived under her father’s care and probably remarried. However, she chose to stay with Naomi.

[Ruth 2:14–16](#) “14 And at mealtime Boaz said to her, “Come here and eat some bread and dip your morsel in the wine.” So she sat beside the reapers, and he passed to her roasted grain. And she ate until she was satisfied, and she had some left over. 15 When she rose to glean, Boaz instructed his young men, saying, “Let her glean even among the sheaves, and do not reproach her. 16 And also pull out some from the bundles for her and leave it for her to glean, and do not rebuke her.””

*In verse 14, what did Boaz provide for Ruth?* Boaz gave her bread with wine and roasted grain. Ruth is a widow who is currently gathering grain from another person's field and does not have much food. Notice that he gave her so much food, that she could not finish it.

*What additional instructions did Boaz give to his workers?* He told them to provide her extra grain. She was allowed to take grain from the sheaves they had bundled. They were also instructed to remove part of the bundle for her.

### Ruth's report to Naomi

[Ruth 2:17-18](#) “17 So she gleaned in the field until evening. Then she beat out what she had gleaned, and it was about an ephah of barley. 18 And she took it up and went into the city. Her mother-in-law saw what she had gleaned. She also brought out and gave her what food she had left over after being satisfied.”

*When did Ruth stop collecting grain?* She gleaned until evening. Remember she had begun in the early morning with very little rest ([Ruth 2:7](#)). **After** a long day of work, she beat out the grain from her harvest.

*What did she give to Naomi?* She gave her an ephah of barley. An ephah is about 4-5 gallons of grain. She also gave her the leftover lunch. Both of these indicated that Ruth had an unusually productive day.

[Ruth 2:19-20](#) “19 And her mother-in-law said to her, “Where did you glean today? And where have you worked? Blessed be the man who took notice of you.” So she told her mother-in-law with whom she had worked and said, “The man's name with whom I worked today is Boaz.” 20 And Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, “May he be blessed by the Lord, whose kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead!” Naomi also said to her, “The man is a close relative of ours, one of our redeemers.””

*What did Naomi tell Ruth about Boaz?* He was a relative and a redeemer (see [Ruth 3-4](#)). Notice that Naomi says Boaz was kind to the living **and the dead** ([Ruth 2:20](#)). There are two ways that Boaz was kind to the dead. First, his kindness toward Naomi and Ruth extends to Naomi's husband and sons, especially as the redeemer. If he redeems Elimelech's property, it will stay in Naomi's family.

Second, if he redeems Ruth, he will give Naomi grandchildren. Listen to the description of Abraham's faith in God's promise to give him descendants in his old age. [Romans 4:17-19](#) “17 as it is written, “I have made you the father of many nations”—in the presence of the God in whom he believed, **who gives life to the dead** and calls into existence the things that do not exist. 18 In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told, “So shall your offspring be.” 19 He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was **as good as dead** (since he was about a hundred

years old), or when he considered the **barrenness of Sarah's womb.**" Naomi and Ruth were childless (grand-childless). A redeemer would give life to the dead.

[Ruth 2:21-23](#) "21 And Ruth the Moabite said, "Besides, he said to me, 'You shall keep close by my young men until they have finished all my harvest.' " 22 And Naomi said to Ruth, her daughter-in-law, "It is good, my daughter, that you go out with his young women, lest in another field you be assaulted." 23 So she kept close to the young women of Boaz, gleaning until the end of the barley and wheat harvests. And she lived with her mother-in-law."

*How long did Ruth gather grain in Boaz's field?* She remained there until the end of the harvest.

## Conclusion

### Purpose

The book of Ruth has two related purposes. First, the book was written to highlight redemption. [Ruth 1-2](#) highlights the **need** for redemption. Ruth and Naomi are widow. They depend on others for food. They have no children for their inheritance. [Ruth 3-4](#) highlight the **means** of redemption. Boaz is able and willing to redeem their land and inheritance and to marry Ruth and give them children.

Second, the book of Ruth was written to prepare the way for David. David was a descendent of Boaz and Ruth. God chose David as king and made a covenant with him that the Christ would be his descendent. In Christ, the two themes converge. Christ is the eternal king who descends from David. Christ is the eternal redeemer ([Heb 9:12](#)).