

# Ruth

Introduction to Ruth: placement—topic, chronology, or genre? The *Ketuvim* or “Writings.” The story of Ruth—resolve, rights, request, and reward

## The Attraction of Ruth

- A simple, beautiful story
  - Poetic flights are contained in **short, pastoral narrative** (a **romantic short story**, really)
- Deals with **personal and family issues** rather than national and cosmic matters
  - Strong women deal with the emotional and economic disaster of widowhood and take control of their destinies
  - Presents a good model for that most berated relationship—that between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law
- **God blesses good people in direct but “unmiraculous” ways**

## The Placement of Ruth

- English Bibles, following the LXX, place it **between Judges and I Samuel**
  - “In the days **when Judges ruled . . .**” (1:1)
  - The closing **genealogy connects the family story with that of David, the first king (4:18–22)**
- While the topic and the dating of its story fit, the genre and the date of composition put it in **a different class than the Deuteronomistic History**
- Hebrew Bibles place it instead **in the *Ketuvim* part of the *Tanak***

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## *Ketuvim*

- The ***Ketuvim* or writings** are distinguished from *Torah* (“Law,” namely Genesis–Deuteronomy) and *Nevi'im* (“Prophets,” both Former [DH] and the Latter)
- The writings of this section were the **last to take shape**, starting **at some point after the exile and continuing as late as the first century B.C.**
- Consists of diverse genres
  - Songs and Prayers (Psalms)
  - Wisdom Literature (Proverbs, Job)
  - Apocalyptic Literature (Daniel—prophesied earlier, but the book as currently stands was revised and edited later)
  - **Chroniclers History** (1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah)
  - **Diverse material grouped together as “The Five Scrolls”** (Song of Solomon, **Ruth**, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, and Esther)

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## The Five Scrolls

- Represents some of ancient Israel's most **reflective literature on the human condition**—stories and expositions on **love**, **loyalty**, **death**, **loss**, and **destiny**
  - Later practice had them read at the great festivals: *Ruth was read at Shavuot (Pentecost) because of its reference to the barley harvest*
- Little in common with each other in form or content
  - **A romantic short story (Ruth)**
  - A collection of dirges (Lamentations)
  - Love poetry (Song of Solomon)
  - A Philosophical treatise (Ecclesiastes)
  - A historical novella (Esther)

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## Overview of Ruth

- Author: Unknown
  - Original early story may have been heavily edited or reworked in a later period
- Possible Dates
  - **Early** (between 950 and 700 B.C.)
    - part of the cultural flowering of the united monarchy or the glorification of the Davidic dynasty under the Divided Monarchy
  - **Late** (after the exiled, c. 537 B.C. and following)
    - Some Aramaic and later usages
    - *Might have meant to counter the reforms of Ezra, who forbade marriage with Moabites* (Ezra 10:1–5; Nehemiah 13:23–27)
- Important Themes and Ideas
  - **Chesed** or “loyalty and loving kindness”
    - the most common biblical epithet for YHWH, here it is illustrated primarily between members of a family
  - **Family continuity**
    - Achieved largely through women
    - Nevertheless, Ruth is compared explicitly not only with Rachel and Leah but also with Tamar! (4:11–12; cf. Genesis 38)
  - **Choice of faith more important than nationality**
  - Appendix: *after-the-fact glorification of David by the honoring of his ancestors*; a sort of prologue to the accounts of kings that follows

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## Ruth: A Story in Four Acts or Scenes

- Ruth's Resolve (1:1–22)
- Ruth's Rights (2:1–23)
- Ruth's Request (3:1–18)
- Ruth's Reward (4:1–22)
- Cast of Characters: What's in a name?
  - **Elimelech**: “**God is my king**” → points to period of Judges without a king; end of story points to the king par excellence, David
  - **Naomi**: “**Pleasant**” → calls herself Mara or “Bitter”
  - **Mahlon** (Ruth's husband) and Chilion “**Sickness**” and “Spent” → signifies the end of the family
  - Orpah: “Back of the Neck” → reluctantly turns away from Naomi
  - **Ruth**: “**Friend, Companion**”
  - **Boaz**: “**In Him is Strength**”

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## Ruth's Resolve (1:1–22)

- Elimelech's Family Goes to Moab (1:1–5)
  - Compare this with Joseph in Egypt, depart because of famine and return by means of a deliverer
- Naomi and Her Moabite Daughters-in-Law (1:6–22) Ruth's Choice (1:6–18)
  - “And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, *or* to return from following after thee: **for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God:** Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the LORD do so to me, and more also, *if ought* but death part thee and me.” (1:16–17)
- Their Arrival at Bethlehem (1:19–22)
  - Naomi's complaint
  - “And she said unto them, **Call me not Naomi, call me Mara: for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, and the LORD hath brought me home again empty: why then call ye me Naomi, seeing the LORD hath testified against me, and the Almighty hath afflicted me?**” (1:20–21)

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## Ruth's Rights (2:1–23)

- Ruth's Right to Glean (2:1–3)
- The Results of Her Gleaning (2:4–17)
  - Boaz Meets Ruth (2:4–7)
    - Boaz fills the role of **go'el** or **"redeemer"** to the family—consider how he is a savior figure . . .
  - Boaz Protects Ruth (2:8–13)
    - "And Boaz answered and said unto her, **It hath fully been shewed me, all that thou hast done unto thy mother in law since the death of thine husband: and how thou hast left thy father and thy mother, and the land of thy nativity, and art come unto a people which thou knewest not heretofore.** The LORD recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the LORD God of Israel, **under whose wings thou art come to trust.** Then she said, Let me find favour in thy sight, my lord; for that thou hast comforted me, and for that thou hast spoken friendly unto thine handmaid, though I be not like unto one of thine handmaidens." (2:11–13)
    - Boaz Provides for Ruth (2:14–17)
- The Reports of Ruth's Gleaning (2:18–23)

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## Ruth's Request (3:1–18)

- Ruth and Boaz at the Threshing Floor (3:1–18)
  - Suggested by Naomi (3:1–5)
    - "Shall I not seek rest [marital security] for thee, that it may be well with thee?" (3:1)
  - Executed by Ruth (3:6–9)
    - The "ruse" of laying at his feet—Boaz may have *thought* that something had gone on during the night!
    - "And he said, 'Who *art* thou?' And she answered, 'I *am* Ruth thine handmaid: **spread therefore thy skirt over thine handmaid;** for **thou art a near kinsman.**" (3:9)
      - A proposal!
      - Cf. 2:12 and being covered by the Lord's wings
    - Thou hast shown more **kindness (*chesed*)** in the latter end than at the beginning . . ." (3:10)
    - "thou are a virtuous woman" = a woman of appropriate social status
  - Agreed by Boaz (3:10–18)

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## Ruth's Reward (4:1–22)

- The Marriage of Boaz and Ruth (4:1–12)
  - Apparently Naomi had property from Elimelech, which she was trying to sell; *a member of the clan needed to buy it first to keep it in the family*
  - Did the nearer kinsmen really need to “buy” Ruth?
    - **Levirate marriage** (*levir* for brother-in-law; Deut 25:5–10), only applied to a brother
  - Blessing of the elders
    - “And all the people that *were* in the gate, and the elders, said, *We are witnesses. The LORD make the woman that is come into thine house like Rachel and like Leah, which two did build the house of Israel: and do thou worthily in Ephratah, and be famous in Bethlehem: And let thy house be like the house of Pharez, whom Tamar bare unto Judah, of the seed which the LORD shall give thee of this young woman.*” (4:11–12)
      - **Tamar!**
- A Son (4:13–17)
- The Genealogy of David (4:18–22)
  - Boaz and David hold the favored positions, seventh and tenth

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