

Reading Ruth

The Big Picture

Ruth 1

- Leaving the Land > Hardship
- Returning to the land > Decisions

Ruth 2

- Ruth meets Boaz, the kinsman-redeemer

Ruth 3

- Ruth appeals to Boaz for redemption

Ruth 4

- Boaz redeems Ruth's family
- Birth of David's Grandfather

"[The Book of Ruth] is an intricately woven, magnificently crafted tale. It is the work of a person standing in the mid-stream of Israelite life and thought, a person wishing to communicate to his audience things very close to the heart of the Old Testament. As well as being an artist, he is also a teacher, teaching with what in many instances is the most effective medium one can choose, a short story. I stand in awe of this author. He was a genius." – Edward F. Campbell, Jr. (Anchor Bible Commentary)

Main Themes in Ruth

1. Ruth (a Moabite, traditionally enemies of Israel) becomes part of Yahweh's plan to redeem Israel through a king.

1:1 *In the days when the judges ruled.* . . [Highlights Judges' theme of the need for a king]

4:21 *...Boaz the father of Obed, Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse **the father of David.***

2. Ruth and Boaz are examples of "covenant faithfulness" (*chesed*, חֶסֶד) in the messianic lineage:

- Ruth trusts in Yahweh and commits herself to his people (1:16-18)
- Boaz serves as the *kinsman-redeemer* (*go'el*, גֹּאֵל) of Ruth and Naomi's family
A *go'el* was an Israelite practice where a family member was obligated to:
 - (1) restore the wrong done by a relative (Leviticus 5:20-26)
 - (2) avenge the murder of a relative (Numbers 35:9-28)
 - (3) pay for a relative who has been forced into debt-slavery (Leviticus 35:47-55)
 - (4) purchase family property that, because of poverty or death, could be sold outside of the family (Lev 25:24-25) [This is what happens in Ruth 4]
 - (5) deliver a member of one's kinship group from harm or misfortune of any kind.
- Boaz is offered as a model of obedience to the Torah
 - in his treatment of the poor: In Ruth 2 Boaz follows Leviticus 19:9-10; Deut 24:19
 - in redeeming Naomi's lineage: according to the family-marriage law in Deut 25:5-10
 - he catches the closer kinsman trying to defraud Naomi of the land and redeems Naomi and Ruth to his own economic disadvantage: Ruth 4:1-13

3. Ruth is a narrative example of the "noble woman" of Proverbs 31 (the phrase "noble woman" *'eshet chayil*, אִשֶּׁת חַיִּיל, occurs only in Prov 31:10 and Ruth 3:11)

- She makes the offer of marriage to Boaz in an upstanding way: 3:1-4: She is not trying to entice Boaz. Her actions are a cultural signal that her time of mourning is over, and she is available for marriage; see 2 Samuel 12:20 for similar behavior.

4. Ruth shows how God is at work in the day-to-day activities of average people. All the characters face life's normal challenges (death, moving, lack of financial resources, family responsibilities) and find God is weaving a story of redemption out of all the details. The story encourages us to view our day-to-day lives as part of God's bigger plan in our lives and world.

