

# Ruth

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## The Author and Dating

The authorship of Ruth is unclear. The book itself makes no claim toward authorship. While many ascribe the book to Samuel<sup>1</sup> others have offered names including Abarbanel, Hezekiah, Ezra,<sup>2</sup> David, Naomi,<sup>3</sup> Tradition indicates that Samuel wrote Ruth. With early literary style,<sup>4</sup> the book has connections to the rule of the Judges (1:1) as well as King David (4:7,22). The seeming lack of any mention concerning the intermediate Saul leads some to reject Samuel's authorship (since Samuel lived during the reign of Saul).<sup>5</sup> However, before ascribing this book to another writer it should be remembered that Samuel boldly anointed David as King during spiritually destitute times for Israel. Obviously Samuel "had interest" in David. Although some may claim that since David is mentioned in 4:22 Samuel could not have written Ruth, nothing in the passage precludes the idea that Samuel could have written this letter *before* David became King! Samuel could have written the letter to illustrate the nation's need for spiritual revival (conducive to Saul's generation) and also anticipate (as Samuel did) a godly line of rule that would foster faithful covenant actions. Neither David nor his son Solomon is mentioned as King within the whole book. I hold that Samuel wrote Ruth sometime after he anointed David and before his death (circa. 1015 BC).

## The Recipients

Understanding Samuel as the author, Ruth was written to the generation that lived during the reign of Saul and probably before the reign of David.

## The Message

The book stresses several things concerning our God. First, the book stresses God's inclusion of gentiles through faith (1:16,17; 4:10ff). Second, the book demonstrates God's provisional care for his people. This is demonstrated as the Lord provides food for Judah (1:6), the widows (2:1-23) as well as an inheritance (3:1-4:22). Third, the book stresses the need for honest covenantal faith in the Lord. Written during the time of the Judges (a period of poor spiritual health for Israel), Ruth opens indicating a famine in Judah. It must be remembered that famine was an indicator of God's displeasure with that generation (Deut. 28-30). After notice of the famine the scriptures indicate that: 1) Elimelech died 2) His sons married outside Jewish heritage 3) His sons died 4) They left Naomi without continued lineage. These actions taken together foster a negative perspective concerning the covenantal faith of this man and his generation under covenant. At that point Naomi's decision to return (1:6), Ruth's decision to serve Naomi as well as her God (1:16), their trust in the Lord's provision for widows (2:1- 3:18; 4:13ff) and Boaz' willingness to act as a redeemer according to covenant contrast the previous

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<sup>1</sup> John Reed, "Ruth," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1983).

<sup>2</sup> H. D. M. Spence-Jones, "The Pulpit Commentary: Ruth," (Bellington: Logos Research Systems, 2004).

<sup>3</sup> Ronald B. Allen Earl D. Radmacher, H. Wayne House, ed. *New Illustrated Bible Commentary* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1999).

<sup>4</sup> Paul P. Enns, *Ruth: Bible Study Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982). 12.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. 11.

generation's lack of covenantal faith. Such a division helps to promote the book's structure as detailed below.

### **The Purpose**

Several purposes are usually seen within the book of Ruth. First, the closing statements in 4:17ff indicate a purpose to explain David's ancestry. Second, the book's focus on Ruth indicates a purpose to demonstrate gentile inclusion into covenant through faith. Third, the book purposes a focus on God's faithfulness.

While all of these are true to the book, I think the purpose can be summarized by the following. The book demonstrates God's covenantal faithfulness to provide food, land and seed through the actions of Boaz. Boaz' response to provide for the needs of others within the nation demonstrates to the reader faithful covenant actions. Thus God's faithfulness and Boaz' obedience are given in order to promote and define covenantal righteousness to a generation lacking spiritual maturity.

### **The Theme**

Redemption

## Outline of Ruth

- I. Sorrow in Moab 1:1-22**
  - A. The Family of Elimelech 1:1-5
  - B. Naomi's Sorrow 1:6-22
- II. Salvation in Judah 2:1-4:22**
  - A. Provision of Food 2:1-23
    - 1. Naomi and Ruth... "The Plan" 2:1-2
    - 2. Boaz' Provision 2:3-17
    - 3. Naomi and Ruth... "The Rejoicing" 2:18-23
  - B. Provision of Land and Heir 3:1-4:17
    - 1. Naomi and Ruth... "The Plan" 3:1-5
    - 2. Boaz' Promise 3:6-15
    - 3. Naomi and Ruth... "The Rejoicing" 3:16-18
    - 4. Boaz' Provision of Land and Heir 4:1-12
    - 5. Naomi's Rejoicing 4:16-17
  - C. Provision of Heir is of Davidic Ancestry 4:18-22

## Questions from Ruth

1. What is the significance of the family moving to Moab?
2. Does the word "Bethlehem" have any significance to the story line?
3. Describe the custom of gleaning in 2:3 as related to Hebrew Covenant (Lev 19:9, 23:22; Deut 24:21).
4. Explain the custom of land redemption (4:1-15; Lev 25:25ff).
5. Explain the custom of kinsmen marriage (4:16; Deut 25:5-10).
6. Where is Ruth mentioned in the New Testament?
7. What is the overall theme of Ruth?
8. Who wrote the book of Ruth?
9. How did this book benefit the original audience?
10. Describe any ties this book has with Judges.

## Bibliography

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