

Ruth

Themes

- **Land**
- **Dwelling/Temple/Relationship**
- **Royal Priesthood, Image of God & Redemption**
- **Royal Seed & War of the Seeds**
- **Blessing/God is With Us/God Fights for Us**
- **Covenant & Faith**

Some Application Points

- Yahweh is always working- our focus needs to be on living for him not on bemoaning the moral decline around us.
- Hard work out of love for others is a beautiful thing.
- Yahweh's plan advances by using people like himself- humble, loving, faithful.
- God's plan from the beginning includes all nations and includes anyone who will trust in him.

Specific Comments: To understand Ruth we have to connect it both forward and backward. In the backward sense it is set in the time of the Judges and it serves to show a glimmer of hope during the time of the Judges and how God is still moving his plan for creation forward even during this period of complete decline in Israel. Looking forward it explains how the line of King David came about in Israel. It includes themes of gentile inclusion and God's global plan, kingship, faithfulness and loyalty and a vivid picture of what godliness looks like in the midst of a dark generation. Practically it can provide believers with the confidence that even in times where it is unclear how God is moving his plan forward he loves to use insignificant faithful followers of Yahweh to continue the thread of hope throughout history.

Exegetical Notes

- Scene I (Chapter 1)
 - 1:1-2- this is perhaps the bleakest start possible- it is at a terrible time (the judges), during a time when the curse of Deuteronomy is being poured out (famine), causing the people to go to a terrible place (Moab) outside the land God promised them, and they come from a place repeated over and over again in the horrors of Judges 19-21..point: you are supposed to ask, "How could this story possibly go well?"
 - 1:3 the story worsens
 - 1:4 the story gets even worse! (Moabite, non-Israelite wives)

- 1:5 a cursed family in a cursed land in a cursed time, living the consequences of the curse on creation and the curses of the sinai covenant
- 1:6 the first glimmer of hope- a move back in the direction of Yahweh and his people.
- 1:8-13 Naomi seems to exhibit a genuine faith despite some obvious bitterness in her heart
- 1:14-22 Ruth's actions here show the same type of faith that Rahab had. By remaining a widow and staying with her mother in-law she agrees to go to a foreign land, serving a woman who can give her nothing in return, with no hope of finding any man who will marry her and provide for her- she is effectively accepting a life forever as a single widow in need of support from others...and the key hinge upon which it all turns is her conviction that Yahweh is god- "your God will be my God." It is as if Ruth is deciding, if I have Yahweh nothing else matters.
- Scene II (Chapter 2)
 - 2:1- the word here used for Boaz will later be used of David (and others)- it is the idea of a man of upright character who does what is right in God's eyes characteristically.
 - 2:2- Ruth has been and will be characterized throughout the book as "the Moabite woman" to highlight her foreign status. This will cause some characters in the story to treat her with contempt, but not Boaz- on the contrary it brings out his kindness. (keep in mind another "upright" man will show "kindness" to a foreign woman after the death of her husband, but in much more sinister circumstances- David and Bathsheba)
 - 2:2 Many godly women in scripture are portrayed as hardworking and Ruth is perhaps the strongest example of this- it is her work ethic that actually earns the initial interest from Boaz.
 - 2:3 "happened" a number of aspects in this story are construed as just "happening" but against the broader backdrop of what God is doing in history we can see him working through every little detail- it is beautiful how he uses both grand scale movements in history and also small provincial romances to move his plan forward.
 - 2:4 Boaz is characterized by kindness and godliness throughout this story.
 - 2:6 note the slur "moabite woman" "from the land of Moab"
 - 2:8-10 It is not clear if there is any romantic interest at this point but it actually appears moreso that Boaz is just the type of man who would want to make sure a vulnerable foreign woman would be truly protected.
 - 2:11-13 the wording Boaz uses here introduces a very interesting key to understanding the entire book- Naomi describes Ruth as showing her "hesed" (loving loyalty), and Boaz is also described as a man who possesses this quality and is impressed after hearing of Ruth's "hesed" shown to her mother in law. That same word "hesed" is the word used for God's "steadfast love" or his "covenant loyalty" and it is often one of the core characteristics the bible authors highlight. **So, the theological point seems to be this- the character of God is what is driving this entire story- it is his nature to keep his covenant and bring a king to rescue his people, but the way he chooses**

to do so is by using people who also show the same kind of loving loyalty to the weak and needy.

- 2:14-23 the final portion of this scene describes what an incredible yield, what incredible work ethic Ruth has, and how amazed her mother in law is. Naomi confirms that Ruth has basically "struck gold" - but we as the audience know, this was no "happenstance"
- Scene III (Chapter 3)
 - In chapter 3 Naomi cooks up a plot to get Boaz to redeem Ruth and marry her. The plan has generated tons of debate among commentators and the basic question is- does Naomi counsel (and does Ruth do) anything unrighteous? The specific question is whether anything sexual transpires between Ruth and Boaz. The reason for these questions is that the threshing floor is strongly correlated with sexual promiscuity and the "uncovering of the feet" is a Hebrew euphemism for sexual intercourse. So when Naomi counsels Ruth to "uncover his feet" at the "threshing floor" the audience is meant to hear some very heavy overtones. **However** I think that the author is actually using the fact of those overtones to make a theological point: Ruth and Boaz are actually godly. They are in the place and in the situation where things could go very wrong- but there is no indication that anything actually happens.
 - It is possible that this was some type of known custom for proposing marriage but we don't have any evidence for that at this point. What seems most likely to me is that this rather gutsy maneuver (it admittedly could look quite odd) was a way to boldly, but still righteously make your intentions very very clear. I almost imagine Boaz worrying for a moment- "did anything actually happen?" and then smiling and realizing, "Ok I get the message."
 - Note that Boaz calls this a second kindness- in context we can see this means that Ruth is doing this all to provide for Naomi. Boaz isn't the youngest or most marriageable bachelor, but he is godly and he can provide for Naomi. Ruth is again shown as an example of faithful love.
- Scene IV
 - 4:1 this is the location you go if you have legal proceedings to deal with
 - Boaz exhibits here a characteristic of wisdom that comes out a lot in Ruth and Samuel but that we often overlook - he displays cleverness in achieving a righteous goal. He is maneuvering throughout this whole scene. Painting the land as a good opportunity but then dropping in at the end with the information that you must also marry Ruth "the Moabite"- this is a beautiful little irony where the words that had been a slur against her now work in favor to ensure the only Boaz would get her.
 - 4:6 it is hard to tell if this is a legitimate reason or if they guy just doesn't want Ruth- either way Boaz's plan has worked.
 - 4:13-17 while the story indeed focuses a lot on Ruth and Boaz it is ultimately about Naomi and the theological point it makes about her is that she is a woman who has

suffered much but who continues to trust Yahweh and Yahweh is a God who provides for her in the most surprising of ways - a Moabite woman.

- 4:18-22 all of this wonderfully reached its fulfillment with a genealogy which brings us right back to the search for the messiah in genesis where genealogies were used to narrow the camera angle to follow specific families. We now see that this seemingly insignificant story was a chain in the link leading to king David and eventually to the messiah. Even in the darkest of times God is moving and coordinating every detail to accomplish all his mission.