



Ruth

The story of Ruth focuses on the story of three people: Naomi, a widow from Bethlehem in Judah; Ruth, the daughter-in-law who comes from Moab; and Boaz, a land-owning farmer from Bethlehem. This well-known and well-loved story tells of Ruth's dedication to her mother-in-law in following Naomi back to her home and finding ways to take care of her, which ultimately ends up with her marriage to Boaz and her giving birth to one of David's ancestors. There are two levels on which to read this story: the surface level which reveals a story of love and commitment, and the deeper level which reveals a message of what 'foreigners' (even hated foreigners like the Moabites) might contribute to God's story of salvation.



How long will it take?

Reading time: 15 mins
Short of time? Just read 1.1-18; 2.1-11; 3.1-10; 4.13-22



Genre

Short story



Anything tricky?

There is not much tricky here – it's a lovely story.

The trickiest bit is deciding what you think about Ruth lying down beside Boaz's feet – that was against all rules of the day. Some people even think that 'feet' is used euphemistically here to refer to Boaz's genitals, making her action even more bold.



Inspiring quotes

¹⁶ But Ruth said, "Do not press me to leave you or to turn back from following you! Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God. ¹⁷ Where you die, I will die – there will I be buried. May the Lord do thus and so to me, and more as well, if even death parts me from you!"

(Ruth 1.16-17)

May the Lord reward you for your deeds, and may you have a full reward from the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge!

(Ruth 2.12)



About the Author

No one knows anything about the author – it could have been almost anyone from a village storyteller to someone keen to tell the story of the king’s ancestry.



What kind of Book is it?

It is a short story with a strong theological message about loyalty, faithfulness and loving kindness.



Look out for...

The theme of blessing runs all the way through the book. Look out for it as you read and see what role it plays in the story.

Another key role is redemption – what do you think redemption means in the book of Ruth and how does it relate to how we normally use the word?

What do you think about the relationships in the story? Naomi and Orpah; Naomi and Ruth; Ruth and Boaz? Are they healthy relationships?



What could this mean for me?

Is there anyone to whom you would say the words: ‘Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people and your God my God. Where you die, I will die-- there will I be buried.’ (Ruth 1.16-17)? What would make you say them?



About the times

No one knows anything about when it was written either. It could have been written any time from King David’s reign to the post-exilic period.

What were people feeling?

As noted in the summary the story has a bit of an agenda as well as being a lovely story. Ruth showed ‘loving kindness’ to Naomi. The Hebrew word for this is hesed and it is the word that sums up the covenant between God and his people – God shows loving kindness to his people and expects them to show it in return.

It is worth knowing that, as near neighbours, the Moabites were bitter enemies of the Israelites. So for Ruth, a Moabite, to show such profound loving kindness (and then to be the ancestress of King David), could mean that the author of the story was making a strong point about how to view and treat foreigners.

Other books set around this time

Joshua and Judges



How is it structured?

- 1.1-22 Naomi returns home with Ruth bereft
- 2.1-23 Ruth gleanes wheat to survive and meets Boaz
- 3.1-18 Ruth enacts a risky plan to ensure a safe future for her and Naomi
- 4.1-12 Boaz honours Ruth and ensures her future safety
- 4.13-22 Ruth has a child (which she gives to Naomi) and ensures her line which stretches onwards to King David



Discussion group questions

- Were there any parts of the book that you particularly liked or which inspired you?
- Were there any parts of the book that you disliked or which troubled you?
- What did *you* think the book was about?
- Ruth's loyalty, faithfulness to and love of Naomi were pretty costly (meaning that in the end she even gave her her son). Discuss this and reflect on why you think Ruth was prepared to pay such a high price for her love.
- Ruth and Naomi came up with a pretty risky plan (Ruth lying down with Boaz on the threshing floor) to gain the protection they both needed from Boaz. Were they right to do it? What might be the modern equivalent of this kind of plan? When would you say it wasn't OK to do that kind of thing?
- How do you think you should read Ruth? As an inspiring story about love and relationship? As a gritty narrative about survival? As a political statement about how we treat foreigners? Or as something else?
- Did you read anything in the book that touched you, expanded your faith or made you think more deeply about your life and how you live it?



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