

**LOOK AT THE BOOK
RUTH
GOD PLAYS NO FAVORITES**

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AUTHOR

The author is not identified and remains unknown.
The Talmud attributes the book to Samuel, but the evidence is not very convincing.
The emphasis on David and the author's close relationship to the details of the story makes an author contemporary with David a likely possibility.

DATE

If the author is a contemporary of David, the book was probably written about 1000 B.C.
The events occurred during the period of the judges, who were active in Israel from about 1380 to 1050 B.C.
A date during the 12th century has been suggested, though it is impossible to identify an exact time with certainty.

BACKGROUND

The historical background is the same as that of the book of Judges.
Joshua has died.
The people have no strong national leader, so they are doing whatever they feel like doing.

Compromise among God's people--National/religious

They all did what was right in their own eyes yet, they all followed the crowd.

Note the life of Samson.

Note the life of Elimelech and his family 1:1-7, 13, 15-16

Today--national level

Everyone does what's right in their own eyes

"No one can tell me what to do!"

No absolutes

But they all follow the crowd

Spiritual--The spirit catches on--God's people live this way too!

Then and now--familiarity breeds contempt

They have had God too available for their own good.

They begin to take him for granted.

They have left God and His commands and, therefore, are experiencing severe oppression.

As the story begins, God's judgment has brought a severe famine in the land.

To escape the effects of the famine, Elimelech has taken his family to Moab.
He and his sons die there.

As the story progresses, things improve in Israel and Naomi and Ruth return to Israel, hoping to find better opportunities there.

Ruth was from Moab.

As such, she was a descendant of Lot.

The Moabites were known for their opposition to God's people.

Balak, king of Moab, tried to hire Balaam to curse them.

In this historical period also, they were among Israel's oppressors (Jud. 3)

The chief deity of the Moabites was Chemosh who was appeased by human sacrifice which God had prohibited.

Thus there was every reason for hatred between a Moabite and an Israelite. Yet, God dealt with this girl in love.

PURPOSE AND THEME

Ruth presents a dramatic contrast to the people of God described in Judges.

Those who are in covenant relationship with God ought to recognize God's authority over them and obey the standards He has established for them.

Rather than submit to God's authority, they are out of control, each one doing whatever he feels like.

The country is filled with idolatrous and immoral perversion, worse than that commonly found even among pagan nations.

Ruth puts them to shame.

She comes from a pagan nation, but voluntarily accepts Yahweh as her God.

She identifies with His people and accepts His standards as the basis for her lifestyle.

She stood out in a crowd--They were all talking about her. 2:11-12; 3:10-11; 4:15

She sought to know God's way

-To identify with Him

-To obey Him

Therefore, *she* received God's blessing

The result --> she gave birth to a man after God's own heart!

The story progresses gradually, tracing her submission to God's norms.

It reaches a beautiful conclusion as Ruth marries Boaz.

The climax, however, comes as an unexpected surprise:

The unbelievable finale of the story is that this Moabite woman was David's great grandmother.

To be sure that you don't miss the point, it is repeated twice (4:17, 21).

The godly example of Ruth and Boaz, in the midst of severe degeneration in Israel in general, is reflected in God's plan to provide His king through their descendants.
She leaves *everything* to follow Yahweh!
He accepts the responsibility before God that no one else wants!

These elements combine to teach God's people many lessons about Himself and about His will for His people.

The basic lesson of the book is that which Peter states in Acts 10:34: "*God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear Him and do what is right.*" This truth is as true for women as for men.

Ruth's testimony, as a Moabite who recognizes God's right to rule in her life, identifies with His people, and submits to His Word, serves as a testimony to backslidden Israel that convicts the nation of their sin.

God's dealings in her life, and blessing of her, teaches once again that God blesses His people for obedience and curses them for disobedience.

The example of Boaz as a faithful kinsman-redeemer was also significant.
He was obedient to God's standards for His people and God blessed him.
His example also serves as a type to demonstrate how Christ functioned as our Redeemer.

As in the other historical books, God's faithfulness, holiness and sovereignty are clearly demonstrated.
He watches over His people and rewards those who are faithful to Him.
He preserves a remnant of the faithful in every generation and circumstance.

ORGANIZATION

Ruth is developed chronologically, around the major steps she took upon leaving her people and joining Naomi's family.

First, the background of the story is presented (1:1-7);

Next, her decision to return to Israel with Naomi (1:8-22).

Upon arrival in Israel, she gleans in the barley field to get food for them which leads to her meeting Boaz (2).

Following Naomi's advice, she presents herself to Boaz, giving him the opportunity to assume the function of kinsman-redeemer (3).

Finally, she reaps the benefit of her noble action as Boaz claims the estate and marries her (4:1-12).

Together they enjoy God's blessing on their lives and family (4:13-22).

ARGUMENT

RUTH'S COMMITMENT 1-3

HER DECISION 1

Her motivation 1:1-7

First, the background of the story is presented (1:1-7);

The story of Ruth opens with a picture of the days of the judges.

The result of Israel's failure to obey God and walk as his people should, was divine judgment.

God sent other nations to oppress His people, and natural afflictions as well.

God wanted to correct them and bring them back to fellowship with Him.

Famine 1:1-2

During such a time of affliction, a period of severe famine drove Elimelech out of his home in Bethlehem to seek better conditions in Moab.

Death 1:3-5

While there, Elimelech died, leaving his wife and two sons.

The sons demonstrate their lack of submission to God's standards by marrying Moabite women.

Shortly thereafter, the two sons also died.

Their deaths in Moab may be a further indication of their spiritual condition.

In any case, the book itself indicates that the decisions Ruth makes stand out in a context where neither the nation nor the family are noted for their faithfulness to God.

Separation 1:6-7

Following the death of the men of the family, Naomi has to reevaluate her life and circumstances.

When she receives word that God has provided food for His people, she decides to return and identify once more with God's people.

Her identification 1:8-22

The alternatives presented 1:8-13

Her two daughters-in-law are now faced with a decision also:

Should they remain with their mother-in-law, or return to their homes?

Their initial decision is to stay with her out of loyalty and duty.

However, Naomi confronts them with the fact that she has nothing to offer them for the future and urges them to go back home and start a new life there.

The choice made 1:14-18

Orpah's choice 1:14-15

Orpah, aware of the implications of Naomi's words, decides to go back home.

The description of Orpah's decision reveals more of Naomi's spiritual condition. She is urging Orpah to go back to the Moabite gods.

Ruth's choice 1:16-18

Ruth, on the other hand, makes a different choice.

Her loyalty to Naomi is different. Naomi is Ruth's family.

Naomi's God, Yahweh, is now Ruth's God also.

She is committed to Naomi and to Yahweh; she has nothing to go back to in Moab.

She has identified with them.

Realizing the depth and nature of Ruth's commitment, Naomi stops trying to change her mind.

The women welcomed 1:19-22

Together they return to Bethlehem.

The people of the town were excited about Naomi's return. Apparently she was loved and appreciated there.

Nevertheless, in her life in Moab God had dealt severely with her family. She had come back bitter.

God would have to do something special to solve her problem with bitterness.

Neither she nor Ruth suspected how Ruth would be God's instrument to bring blessing into Naomi's life.

After they have settled in Bethlehem, Ruth again demonstrates her dedication to her mother-in-law by offering to go into the fields as a common peasant girl and gather food for them.

Dedication demonstrated 2:1-7

While she is working diligently to supply their needs, Boaz notices her.

Dedication rewarded 2:8-23

He recognizes her loyal love and effort for Naomi and decides to care for her.

Needs provided 2:8-9

He promises to see that her needs are met in his fields.

Loyalty praised 2:10-13

He praises her for her loyalty and identification with Naomi and with Yahweh.

Kindness shown 2:14-16

He shows kindness to her by inviting her to eat with him and protecting her from abuse by other laborers.

Abundance gathered 2:17-18

When Ruth returns home to Naomi, she demonstrates further the nature of Boaz's special attention.

Naomi recognizes that Ruth never could have gathered so much unless someone had been especially kind to her.

Kinsman identified 2:19-23

Naomi begins to understand what God is doing for them when she discovers that the man who has shown special kindness to Ruth is a kinsman, capable of redeeming them.

HER SUBMISSION 3

The most dramatic demonstration of Ruth's identification with Naomi, Yahweh, and Yahweh's people is seen in her willingness to submit to Jewish customs, present herself to Boaz, and possibly, become his wife as well, in order to produce heirs for her deceased husband, and for her mother-in-law.

Naomi's instruction 3:1-5

When the proper time comes, Naomi instructs Ruth as to how she should present herself to Boaz.

Ruth's presentation 3:6-9

Ruth consents to submit to the custom God has established for His people and presents herself to Boaz.

Boaz's confirmation 3:10-18

Boaz is amazed by this act on Ruth's part and praises her for her commitment and submission.

He enthusiastically commits himself to make the necessary arrangements.

Similar to a Christian guy finding a genuinely Christian, submissive woman—committed to God and to him. “Wow! I can't believe it!”

RUTH'S COMPENSATION 4

God's faithfulness and His blessing on those who submit to His authority by obeying His commands is immediately demonstrated, following the account of their submission.

HER WEDDING 4:1-10

Boaz determines to complete the arrangements immediately.

First kinsman eliminated 4:1-8

He must first give the opportunity to a closer kinsman.

The closer kinsman doesn't want to risk taking a Moabite wife, therefore, he passes up his duty.

He fears he would jeopardize his own inheritance!

Boaz motivated 4:9-10

Boaz accepts his responsibility and enthusiastically proceeds to claim the inheritance and Ruth as his wife.

HER BLESSING 4:11-17

Elders' prayer 4:11-12

The elders serving as witnesses to the occasion wish a special blessing from God on Boaz and Ruth, and their descendants.

Naomi's heir 4:13-17

Naomi is presented as enjoying a special blessing from God as she cares for her grandson.

It's apparent that her bitterness has been removed by God's abundant blessing.

HER POSTERITY 4:18-21

The author reveals a final surprise, a totally unexpected climax to the story.

This couple, who obeyed God's standards and experienced God's abundant blessing, were the great grandparents of God's king, the one described as a man after God's own heart.

The blessings which this couple experienced, for their faithfulness in the midst of an unfaithful society, will continue to be a source of blessing to all God's people throughout human history.

WHAT LESSONS DO WE LEARN IN THIS BOOK FOR OUR LIVES TODAY?