

## RUTH

- 1) – Probably composed in the 5th century BC, seven centuries after the time of the Judges, and as the Israelites were returning from exile. It was written at a time when ethnic purity became a dominant theme in post-exilic Judaism. Laws were passed under Ezra and Nehemiah making it a crime to live in Judah unless you were a full-blooded Jew to the tenth generation. Married couples and families were split, political purges were justified. The political point of this story, therefore, is that Ruth, a Moabite, married Boaz, a Jew. Their son was Obed, **his** son Jesse, and **his** son David, the greatest king in the history of Israel. David would have been purged under the laws extant in post-exilic Judah. So Ruth is the great-grandmother of David, and therefore an ancestress of Jesus. **And**, Ruth was a descendant of Moab, who was born of the incest between Lot and one of his daughters (Gen 19:36-38). Perez was the son of Tamar, a Caananite, who was made pregnant by Judah (Gen 38). **And**, Boaz was the son of Salmon, whose wife was Rahab, the harlot who hid Caleb and the other spy. ///  
The key theological concern is redemption. The word is used 23 times. And *Naomi* is the ultimate recipient. It is Naomi's life that is turned around from bitterness and hopelessness. Ruth's faithfulness is God's *instrument* to do this. Applied to Israel -- and to us -- this redemption is due to *God's* faithfulness, not the people of God's. And it is based on grace, not merit.  
A bridge between the judges and David, with Saul a detour: the book begins with reference to the time of the judges and ends with reference to David.
- 2) 1:2 – Mahlon means "sickness," Chilion means "wasting." Elimilech means "My God is King." Bethlehem was once called Ephrath. Ephrath was the second wife of Caleb (1 Chron 2:18-20)(not Moses' spy), whose descendants founded Bethlehem. In fact, Bethlehem was the name of the gr-gr-gr-grandson of Caleb and Ephrath (Caleb→Hur→Shobal→Keriath-jearim→Salma→Bethlehem). There is an irony apparent only in the Hebrew: "There was famine in the 'house of bread.'"
- 3) 1:14 – It is important for modern women to recognize that the actions of Ruth is *described*, not *prescribed* as appropriate behavior. If prescribed, "the book of Ruth becomes an oppressive instrument." (Kathleen Farmer, NIB)
- 4) 1:15-16 – In the *New American Bible*, vs 15 reads "god." (In NSRV & NIV it is "gods"). In 16, "God." In fact, only one Moabite god -- Chemosh -- is ever mentioned in the OT. The translators have made erroneous assumptions about Moabite worship. /// The clauses translated here with "will" are also erroneous. In the Hebrew there is no verb, so vs 16 should read, "your God, my God, etc." Present tense, not future: she has *already* committed to God, family, etc.
- 5) 1:22 – This first-time stress on her origin forecasts the way the people of Bethlehem think of Ruth -- an outsider.
- 6) 2:12 – The same word is used in both 2:12 and 3:9. In 2:12 it is metaphor for the Lord's protection like a mother hen. In 3:9 it is a metaphor for Boaz's protection by marrying Ruth.
- 7) 2:13 – The Hebrew word is "sipha," which can be translated as "female slave" (as in Gen 12:16, 24:35), or as maidservant (as in Ex 11:5), or as one eligible to bear her mistress' husband's child (as Hagar, Bilhah, Zilpah). In this context, "family servant" is probably implied.

- 8) 3:3-4 – Multiple sexual euphemisms: for Hebrew speakers, the euphemistic uses of “know” would have been an amusing double entendre. “Lie down” frequently implies sexual intercourse (Gen 19:33-35 – Lot’s daughters, Gen 30:15-16 -- Jacob and Leah). “Uncover” (*gala*) when combined with “nakedness” refers to genitalia (Isaiah 47:3). In Deut 27:20 *gala* means “removed” -- the man who lies with his father’s wife is cursed because he has “removed” his father’s garment. “Feet” is also commonly used as a euphemism for “lower body,” including the “private parts” (Judges 3:24 and 1 Sam 24:4), where “uncovering his feet” is translated into English as “relieving himself” [urinating]). Modern readers are reluctant to accept that this action of Ruth’s was not a scandalous one, since we tend to believe that *virtue* is rewarded. Kathleen Farmer clearly thinks that Ruth and Boaz had sexual relations that night -- an act not only scandalous but of loving-kindness. But she admits that the narrator was deliberately ambiguous in order that we can choose whether Ruth’s redemption was given as a reward or in spite of her actions.
- 9) 3:9 – She is saying, “Be my protector by marrying me, for you are my next of kin.”
- 10) 3:14 – There was a common association between threshing floors and prostitution, so Boaz is protecting the reputation of himself and/or Ruth.
- 11) 3:15 – Several interpretations of the gift of barley: a bride-price, an option to buy the land described in Chap 4, an apology to *Naomi* because so far her scheme hasn’t worked, payment for services rendered, or a symbol of the restoration of “seed” to Elimelech’s line. But six measures is an impossible amount. A measure is 60 gallons!
- 12) 4:1 – The gate area of nearly every Israelite town had a courtyard lined with benches where business and disputes were handled.
- 13) 4:3 – In the original Hebrew, the verb is “has sold,” not the present tense, indicating that Naomi is now asking for the parcel to be redeemed by the near-kin or Boaz.
- 14) 4:4 – In the Hebrew, the idiom used here is “uncover your ear,” linking this transaction to the uncovering of Boaz on the threshing floor. In Chap 4, as in Chap 3, the “uncovering” is closely related to “recovering.”
- 15) 4:5 – Farmer: The Masoretic text has Boaz saying: “The day you acquire the land, I acquire Ruth.” The NIV, NRSV, and the New American bibles all say “you will acquire,” implying a levirate-type obligation. Farmer says it is better to assume that neither man was obligated. So Boaz’s announcement comes as a pleasant surprise to the near-kin as well as the elders, a solution to both widows’ problems.
- 16) 4:11 – So in Jesus’ ancestry were three women who used trickery to insure their reproductive capacity: Leah, who lay with Jacob on the night he thought he was marrying Rachel (Gen 29:31); Tamar, who tricked Judah into lying with her (Gen38:1-30), and now Ruth. /// A midrash states that Boaz died the day after his marriage to Ruth.