

An Overview of Ruth

Historical Background / Setting

The events in the book of Ruth took place during the time of the Judges (Ruth 1:1). The book of Judges took place after the conquests recorded in Joshua and before the establishment of the monarchy in 1 Samuel. Judges 2 provides a picture of what life was like during the time of the judges, which spanned about 325 years.

After Joshua died, Judges 2:10 says, “And there arose another generation after them who did not know the Lord or the work that he had done for Israel.”

Judges 2:11-19

- Israel sins against the Lord and serve other gods (2:11-13).
- God judges Israel and gives them over to other nations (2:14-15).
- The people of Israel would be in distress (2:15) and cry out to God.
- God would raise up judges to save Israel (2:16-18).
- After the judge died this cycle would repeat itself (2:19).

This was the state of affairs in the promised land for over 300 years. In Joshua, Israel was in possession of the land because of God’s favor. In contrast, during the period in Judges, Israel was continually oppressed by the people of the land due to their sin.

The last verse in Judges is a summary of this period:

“In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (Judges 21:25).

The events of Ruth cover about eleven to twelve years, ten of which are in Moab (Ruth 1:4).

Purposes for Writing

1. To provide a strong contrast to the covenant unfaithfulness that pervades the book of Judges.
2. To show God’s providence in meeting the physical needs of his faithful people.
3. To show how God works through the kindness of ordinary yet faithful people.
4. To highlight God’s covenant faithfulness and his gift of a redeemer.
5. To show the providential ancestry of King David.
6. To show how God can use even the worst of situations for his glory through a redeemer.
7. To show that God welcomes non-Israelites into the covenant. Ruth joins Tamar and Rahab in Matthew’s genealogy of Jesus (Matt 1:1-17).

Structure (John MacArthur)

1. Elimelech and Naomi’s ruin in Moab (1:1–5)
2. Naomi and Ruth’s return to Bethlehem (1:6–22)
3. Boaz’s reception of Ruth in his field (2:1–23)
4. Ruth’s romance with Boaz (3:1–18)
5. Boaz’s redemption of Ruth (4:1–12)
6. God’s reward of Boaz and Ruth with a son (4:13–17)
7. David’s right to the throne of Judah (4:18–22)

