

The Last Days

An In-Depth Study of Biblical Eschatology

The Prophetic Book of Ruth

Ruth 1–4 Essential to Understanding Revelation

The Setting of the Book of Ruth

During the time of the (14) judges (rulers) (1370–1041 B.C.) (from the PL to the Monarchy)
spiritual faith→courage→freedom→abundance→complacency→apathy→dependency→bondage

The Players & Places in Ruth

Elimelech (God is my king): Jewish husband of Naomi (their family lived in Bethlehem, Judah)

Naomi (pleasant): Jewish wife of Elimelech (she later referred to herself as *Mara*: bitter ^{Ruth 1:20})

Mahlon (sickly or weakling): Jewish son of Elimelech & Naomi

Chilion (pining): Jewish son of Elimelech & Naomi

Ruth (friendship): Moabitess wife of Mahlon (1 of 5 women in the genealogy of Jesus ^{Matthew 1:1-17})

Orpah (stubborn): Moabitess wife of Chilion

Boaz (in him is strength): Jewish kinsman of Elimelech and large landowner

Unnamed kinsman-redeemer: Jewish kinsman of Elimelech (a closer relative than Boaz)

Obed (worshiper): Jewish son of Boaz & Ruth (grandfather of David)

Bethlehem (house of bread): Jewish town, NE Judah (ancient *Ephrathah* ^{Ruth 4:11, Micah 5:2}: fruitful)

Moab (seed of father): Pagan nation, mountainous area SE Dead Sea (Moab: son of Lot & daughter)

A Beautiful Love Story (primary-level understanding)

1:1-5 During the time of the judges, Elimelech, Naomi, Mahlon and Chilion (a Jewish family from Bethlehem) went to Moab to live, because of a local famine in all of Israel. As time passed, both of the sons married Moabite women (Ruth and Orpah), but during the ten years they were in Moab, all of the men died (Elimelech, Mahlon and Chilion).

1:6-18 Naomi heard the LORD ended the drought and decided to go back to Bethlehem. She told Ruth and Orpah to return to their “mother’s home” and wished for the LORD to show each of them “kindness”. At first, both of the women wept and said they would return with Naomi to her “people”. However, Naomi told them she had no more sons to offer them and that they should stay in Moab. Orpah kissed Naomi and returned home; however, Ruth “clung” (*dābaq*: cleave, unite ^{Genesis 2:24}) and dedicated herself to Naomi.

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Ruth expressed a beautiful declaration of devotion to Naomi in this sevenfold statement: *Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the LORD deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me.* ^{Ruth 1:16b-17}

1:19-22 So, Naomi and Ruth travelled back to Bethlehem, where they were met with some stirring in the town about Naomi's return. Naomi told the people to call her Mara, "because the Almighty" made her life "bitter". She said she left Bethlehem "full", but "the LORD brought [her] back empty". She was aware the LORD (the Almighty) had His hand upon her, but all she could see at that point in time was the negative ^{Genesis 50:20a}. Naomi and Ruth ("the Moabites") arrived just "as the barley harvest was beginning".

Naomi and Ruth's trip from Moab to Bethlehem probably took 7-10 days, because they had to travel ~75 miles over rough terrain, with large elevation changes: from Moab (+4500 ft) down to the Jordan River (-1400 ft) and then up again to Bethlehem (+3750 ft).

2:1-13 In order for them to have food, because they were destitute, Ruth offered to go gather leftover grain after the harvesters had passed through a section of field, and Naomi agreed. "As it turned out", Ruth was gleaning in a field belonging to Boaz, "from the clan of Elimelech, a man of standing" (valor) ^{v.1}. When Boaz arrived, he greeted his workers and asked who Ruth was. After being informed about Ruth (and undoubtedly recognizing he was her kinsman through Naomi), Boaz told Ruth to stay in his fields, that she would be safe, and gave her special rights in collecting grain and getting drinks from the water for his workers. Ruth responded with great humility and appreciation, especially because she was a "foreigner" (an alien from Moab). Boaz admitted to knowing about Ruth leaving her home in order to show great kindness to Naomi.

Was Ruth in Boaz' field by chance? ^{v.3} Chance is really the providence of the sovereign God.

The greetings Boaz exchanged with the harvesters ("The LORD be with you!" and "The LORD bless you!" ^{v.4}) emphasized the exceptional godliness of Boaz and his workers.

2:14-23 Boaz' special treatment of Ruth not only continued, but increased. He began feeding her (bread, wine vinegar and roasted grain) during the day, and he made sure she gathered some of the best grain for herself and Naomi. When Ruth arrived back home, she told Naomi all that had happened to her. Once Naomi heard who the kindness came from, she told Ruth that Boaz was one of their "kinsman-redeemers" (*gā'al*), and that Ruth should always return to his fields, as Boaz had suggested. Ruth continued to glean the fields of Boaz throughout both the barley and the wheat harvests.

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3:1-7 Wanting to repay Ruth for her faithfulness and seeing an opportunity in Boaz, Naomi asked if she should find a “home” (literally: ‘rest’; practically: ‘husband’) for Ruth. Boaz and his workers would be “winnowing barley on the threshing floor” that night, so Naomi recognized an opportunity to help Ruth and herself gain long-term security for their lives. She instructed Ruth to prepare herself with her best appearance and to propose marriage to Boaz by using an ancient custom (and would also be requesting his help as their kinsman-redeemer). According to the custom, after Boaz had fallen asleep, Ruth was to uncover his feet and then lie down at his feet. Ruth did as Naomi had said.

Naomi knew Boaz and his workers would all be watching or sleeping near the piles of grain (on the threshing floor and in the fields) in order to protect his harvest against thieves.

3:8-13 “In the middle of the night”, Boaz woke up, recognized immediately Ruth’s actions and what they meant, and responded very positively. Boaz did, however, admit there was a man who was a “nearer” kinsman (a closer relation) to Elimelech, and so the offer must be made to that man first, to see if he wished to redeem Naomi and Ruth. Boaz assured Ruth he would take care of informing the nearer kinsman, find out the man’s decision and would be willing to fulfill the responsibility if the first man would not.

When Boaz woke up, Ruth requested that he “spread the corner of his garment over [her]”. This was not an immoral advance, but a request based on a Jewish custom of wanting his protective covering in the covenant of marriage. ^{Ezekiel 16:8}

3:14-18 Ruth got up while it was still dark so as not to start any rumors of impropriety. Before she went home, Boaz gave Ruth a large amount of barley, sent her home and headed to town to begin the process to determine who the kinsman-redeemer would be. Ruth shared everything that happened with Naomi, who wisely decided they should wait.

4:1-8 Boaz went directly to the town gate, met with the kinsman-redeemer and ten of the town elders and explained the situation with Naomi and Ruth. Immediately, the kinsman-redeemer stated he would “redeem it”. However, once it was made clear to him that in order to carry out the duty, he must “acquire” (marry) Naomi or Ruth, the nearer kinsman withdrew his offer of redemption, because, as he said: “I might endanger my own estate.” The man then showed his desire to let Boaz be the kinsman-redeemer by giving his sandal (a traditional way of indicating property transfer) to Boaz.

There are two main interpretations of the phrase: “Naomi ... is selling the piece of land”.

1. Elimelech did not sell his land before leaving for Moab, and so Naomi was preparing to sell the land now in order to obtain living expenses for her and Ruth.

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2. Elimelech sold the land before leaving, but Naomi retained the right of redemption, and it was this right that she was selling, in order to regain control of the land.

The nearer kinsman chose not to fulfill his duty, because he was unwilling to split his current holdings between his existing children and any children resulting from his marriage to Ruth.

4:9-12 In a legal declaration, Boaz stated to the elders he would redeem Naomi's family land and marry Ruth. The elders proclaimed themselves witnesses of the announcement and prayed for the union of Boaz and Ruth to "build up the house of Israel" just like Rachel and Leah ^{Genesis 29:31 – 30:24, 49:1-28}, as well as wishing their family to be "like that of Perez" ^{Genesis 38}, who was born as the result of an immoral kind of levirate 'union'.

4:13-22 Boaz & Ruth married and had a son named Obed, who was the father of Jesse, who was the father of David ^{1 Chronicles 2:11-15, Matthew 1:5-6, Luke 3:31}. Naomi and her friends praised the LORD for her renewed life. The last five verses name the ten 'generations' from Perez to David ^{Matthew 1:3-6, Luke 3:31-33} (represents the patriarchs to the monarchy).

Relevant Jewish Laws & Principles (secondary-level understanding)

Mosaic Laws Applicable to Ruth:

Gleaning God's OT method for feeding the needy ^{Leviticus 19:9-10, 23:22, Deuteronomy 24:19-22}

Levirate Marriage A childless widow's way to continue a family name ^{Deuteronomy 25:5-10}

Redemption Provision for reclaiming the land and the people of God ^{Leviticus 25:23-28, 47-55}

Year of the Jubilee Every fifty years the Jewish people were required to release prisoners/slaves, cancel debts and return property to the original owner ^{Leviticus 25:8-55}.

However, there is no record of this law ever being followed by the nation of Israel.

Jewish Principles in Ruth:

Jewish Title Deeds The Promised Land was and is the property of God ^{Leviticus 25:23}.

As a result, a Jew could never sell their land permanently. However, if they needed to, they could sell (more like lease) the land by drawing up a title deed with the contract (on front) and the redemption provisions ^{Leviticus 25:23-24} (possibly on back ^{Revelation 5:1}).

Corner & Edge of Garment represents God's covenant with and protective covering over Israel ^{Ezekiel 16:8}. The hems on priestly garments ^{Numbers 15:37-41} signify God's law and the edges of Jesus' clothing contained great power ^{Mark 6:56, Luke 8:43-44}.

Kinsman-Redeemer is a man with the ability and desire to help a close family member (near kinsman) to redeem sold property (Law of Redemption) and, if necessary, to marry a childless widow to carry on the family name (Law of the Levirate Marriage).

Minyan is the quorum of 10 Jewish men required to carry out religious or legal functions

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Symbolism of the Church (prophetic-level understanding)

Boaz was a kinsman-redeemer for Naomi and Ruth. He not only redeemed the land, but He “purchased” Ruth ^{Acts 20:28, 1 Corinthians 6:19-20} to be his bride ^{Ephesians 5:22-33}.

Boaz seems to be a model (type, symbol) of Jesus Christ. Jesus will be the ultimate kinsman-redeemer for Israel and the church in the End Times ^{Revelation 5:5, 9-10}.

Naomi symbolized Israel (the pleasant land ^{Genesis 49:15, Psalm 16:6, Psalm 106:24, Zechariah 7:14}). She was forced from her land (diaspora) by a judgement (famine ^{Deuteronomy 28:18,24}), because of many repeated failures in the time of the judges, then allowed to go back. The bitterness of Naomi (*Mara*) was reminiscent of all the hardships Israel had faced.

Ruth was a model of the church. She was a Moabitess (a non-Jew) who learned about the LORD from Naomi (Israel), counted the cost ^{Luke 14:27-32} (go back to her former home or go ahead with Naomi?), but desired to stay with and was willing to commit to Naomi (Ruth’s tie to her inheritance), even with an unknown future. Her Godly character was reflected in her decision to stay and dedicate herself to Naomi and the LORD ^{Ruth 1:16b-17}, and that decision changed her life. Ruth (church) became a bride to Boaz (Jesus).

Orpah was a model of the unbeliever. As a Moabitess (a pagan), she sensed the beauty of Naomi, but Orpah was afraid of the potential hardships involved with following her. Instead, Orpah was unwilling to dedicate her life to Naomi (and to God), because she desired the easy path ^{Matthew 7:13}, so she returned to Moab (a symbol of the world).

Unnamed Kinsman modeled the Mosaic Law that cannot redeem ^{Acts 13:39, Romans 3:20}.

Unnamed Foreman Like the HS, he initiated contact between Ruth & Boaz ^{John 16:13-14}.

Final Notes of Interest:

Grace over Law According to the Law, Moabites were forbidden to participate in the national or religious life of Israel, because of their bad treatment of the Israelites as they were approaching the Promised Land ^{Deuteronomy 23:3-6}. However, Ruth had to depend upon the grace and mercy of her Lord (Boaz). The Law excludes humans from the family of God, but Grace includes us if we put our faith in Christ ^{Ephesians 2:8-9}.

Ruth 3:3 There are curious allusions to salvation in the directives Naomi gave to Ruth: wash ^{Titus 3:5}, anoint ^{1 John 2:20,27}, dress ^{Galatians 3:26-27}, lay claim (answer ^{Revelation 3:20}).

Jewish Festival of *Shavuot* (Feast of Weeks) (to Christians: Pentecost)

Ruth is read every year at Shavuot; it is the only Jewish feast using leavened bread.