

Introduction to Ruth

Author and Date

The story of Ruth takes place in the time of the judges (after the conquest of Canaan and before c. 1050B.C.). No author is named, but the mention of David and his genealogy (4:17–22) places the writing sometime after David became king (2 Samuel 2) in c. 1010B.C.

The Theological Message of Ruth

The characters in Ruth are beacons of light in the dark days of the judges. Like Deborah (Judges 4), they prove that faithful followers of God serve him even in harsh circumstances. Though God mainly stays behind the scenes in this book, the people's statements, prayers, and testimonies highlight his mercy.

God extends mercy to the bereaved and the foreigner in Ruth 1. Naomi, a refugee from Bethlehem, suffers the loss of her husband and two sons while sojourning in Moab (1:1–5). Left with two Moabite daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth, she counsels them to go home to their mothers, and Orpah does (1:6–14). But Ruth stays. More importantly, she converts to faith in God (1:15–18). Naomi's time in Moab has yielded important spiritual fruit, for God's mercy has reached another non-Israelite (cf. Ex. 12:38; Num. 12:1; Josh. 2:8–21). Furthermore, although Naomi does not know it yet, Ruth has become God's means of mercy for her. Thus these widows have God and one another as they journey to Bethlehem. Once there, Naomi, which means "Pleasant," renames herself "Bitter" (Ruth 1:19–22).

But God sees to it that she does not remain bitter. Industrious Ruth soon meets Boaz, a man of integrity who fulfills Leviticus 19:18–37 by letting Ruth work with his employees so she and Naomi will have food (Ruth 2:1–16). Furthermore, he is a "kinsman-redeemer," a relative responsible for helping them. Unlike the abused concubine in Judges 19:22–26, Ruth is completely safe in his care. Naomi realizes that God has met their need through Boaz (Ruth 2:20), and she turns from her bitterness.

Next, God extends mercy to Ruth and Boaz by bringing them together in 3:1–4:10. Naomi knows a kinsman-redeemer can marry Ruth, so she sends Ruth to Boaz to express the wish that they marry (3:1–11). Recognizing Ruth's worthiness (3:11), Boaz happily agrees and removes all barriers to their union (3:12–4:10). The people of Bethlehem welcome the marriage and bless the couple (4:11–12), thus providing a beautiful example of acceptance of an outsider. This episode presents Israel at its welcoming best.

Finally, God extends mercy to the childless and to the whole nation in 4:13–22. Ruth has a child, her first. She gives this child to Naomi to receive care and to care for Naomi when she is old. Once again the community approves (4:12–17). God's providence is highlighted as this child is an ancestor of David (4:18–22), who becomes king of Israel and ancestor of Jesus (Matt. 1:1–17; Rom. 1:3). God

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blesses Israel through the marriage of an Israelite and a Moabite, and through Jesus he blesses all nations, just as he had promised Abraham (Gen. 12:1–9).

Ruth shows that God works in history through people. Ruth's and Boaz's kindness reflects the Lord's steadfast love. Through faithful people, he blesses faithful people. Yet he does more. Through faithful Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz, he blesses Bethlehem so that Jesus may follow and make faithful people out of wicked ones. God's mercy extends far and wide.

Outline

- Introduction: Naomi's Family Dies (1:1-5)
- Scene 1: Naomi Returns to Bethlehem with Ruth (1:6-22)
- Scene 2: Ruth Gleans in Boaz's Field (2:1-23)
- Scene 3: Ruth, at the Threshing Floor, Asks Boaz to Marry Her (3:1-18)
- Scene 4: Boaz Arranges Redemption at the Gate (4:1-12)

Introduction to 1 & 2 Samuel

Author and Date

The author or authors of 1 and 2 Samuel are not known. These books recount the stories of Samuel, Saul, and David. Saul's reign began between 1050 and 1030 B.C. and ended in 1010. David then reigned until 971. The books were probably written soon after the end of David's reign.

The Theological Message of 1 & 2 Samuel

As 1–2 Samuel begins, God has been keeping his covenant promises to Noah, Abraham, and Israel for centuries. His grace has overcome human sin repeatedly, and he has drawn many faithful people to his side. But there is more to do, since he has only begun to bless all nations through Israel, Abraham's descendants (Gen. 12:1–9). These books provide the next major building block in God's redemptive plan for mankind, for they introduce God's covenant with David, a descendant of Ruth and Boaz (Ruth 4:18–22). God's sure promises to David connect the previous covenants and take the story forward toward Jesus, his body the church, and his ultimate rule over new heavens and earth.

Before David and this key covenant appear, however, the transition from the era of the judges to the monarchy occurs. Born to faithful parents (1 Sam. 1:1–2:11), Samuel replaces Eli and his corrupt sons as God's chief priest (2:12–3:21), turns Israel from idolatry, and defeats the Philistines (4:1–7:17). But the people are not satisfied. They ask for a king (8:1–9), unwilling to wait for God to establish the monarchy Moses said would arise (8:10–22; Deut. 17:14–20). In Saul, the people get a king whose character is like theirs. Although God gives Saul victory over his foes (1 Sam. 11:1–11), he loses faith in God's plans (13:2–12). While God deserves obedience, Saul does not follow God's Word fully but instead seeks glory for himself (15:1–12).

God decides to start afresh with a new king. He replaces Saul just as he once replaced Moses. He chooses David to succeed Saul (16:1–13), but it takes years for David to become king. God allows Saul to persecute David (16:14–30:31). When Saul dies (ch. 31), seven more years pass before all Israel enthrones David (2 Sam. 2:1–5:16). Like Joseph (Genesis 37–41), David learns to suffer before he is allowed to rule. Many of the psalms he writes deal with these hard times. Once king, he goes from one success to another (2 Sam. 5:17–6:23). God honors his chosen one through suffering and glory.

The greatest honor comes in 2 Samuel 7. God's covenant promises to David are some of the same blessings he gave Abraham and Israel: a great name (7:9), rest in the land (7:10), and descendants (7:11–12). But he promises even more, pledging that David's throne will endure forever (7:13–16), and David realizes that this promise relates to all of mankind, not just Israel (7:17–19). The previous covenant promises remain intact as they connect to David. As the rest of the Bible unfolds, the writers look to David's family for a Savior who will deliver the people from sin, death, and all other enemies.

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The NT authors uniformly agree that Jesus of Nazareth is the Savior from David's lineage (Matt. 1:1–17; Luke 3:23–38; Rom. 1:3; Rev. 5:5). Like David, he suffers before he reigns.

Despite his importance, David is flawed, just as Noah, Abraham, and Moses were. He commits adultery and murder after God makes this covenant with him, and he endures rebellion and loss as a result (2 Samuel 11–20). Yet, as he approaches death, this covenant king writes psalms that credit God with delivering him from every trouble he has faced (22:1–23:7). His final act in 1–2 Samuel shows his heart for God: he buys a property on Mount Zion, where God's temple will be built (2 Sam. 24:18–25; 1 Chron. 22:1). Thus David responds to God's sure promises not just with psalms but also with plans to provide for his son to build a place where the people may worship the God of great promises.

1 Samuel Outline

- The Story of Samuel (1:1-7:17)
- Transition to the Monarchy (8:1-22)
- The Story of Saul (9:1-15:35)
- The Story of Saul and David (16:1-31:13)

2 Samuel Outline

- The Story of King David (1:1-20:26)
- Epilogue (21:1-24:25)