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# RUTH

God's Unstoppable Love

## God. Naomi. Ruth.

Does God's love sometimes feel distant? Have loss and pain clouded your vision of God's faithfulness? Do you wonder if He cares? Do you struggle with believing God enough to find Him worth obeying and following?

## LOVE: COMPLETE | UNENDING | ALWAYS-AND-FOREVER

### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

*Getting into the "sand" of the story...*

#### Author and Date of Writing

The Talmud (*Bava' Batra* 14b) and other rabbinic literature suggest that the prophet Samuel wrote the book. Conservative scholar, Robert Hubbard, thinks a woman could have written it; however, this is not a very tenable argument for a number of reasons.

Although it is quite likely that Samuel penned this beautiful story, a concrete answer regarding which human author God inspired to record this narrative may elude us until glory. The archaic language seems to point to an early date (10<sup>th</sup> century BC). This places the historical setting during the times of the judges (cf. 1:1) between 1350 BC to 1051 BC.

### Key Literary Features

Known for its literary quality and beauty, the book of Ruth is an exquisite representation of classical Hebrew *narrative* prose. The book is uniquely arranged in four major acts, which are represented in four chapter divisions. All four major acts contain three scenes, aside from the final element of the triad found in chapter four, which is more accurately classified as an epilogue.

While Ruth is the most famous character in the story and the one for which the book is named, the central and most dynamic character is actually Naomi. Ruth (most predominantly) and Boaz demonstrate the kind of loyal love (*chesed* – "covenant love," "loving-kindness," or "grace") that is characteristic of the Lord and, in turn, soften Naomi's heart (and the reader's) toward the sovereign love and faithfulness of God.

### CULTURAL BACKGROUND

*Getting into the "sandals" of the story...*

#### The Central Theme

Contrary to popular belief, this book is not primarily about human love and romance. What's the main point? A: *Despite the dark and difficult circumstances of life, God remains lovingly faithful to His people, and blesses their faithful obedience and self-sacrificial love.*

The book of Ruth is set in a historical context of spiritual darkness and widespread disobedience in the land of Israel ("the days of the judges" - 1:1). While chapters 17-21 in the book of Judges describe an ever-deepening spiral of disobedience and godlessness, and the negative effects thereof, the book of Ruth stands as a lesson in obedience and faithfulness to the Lord, and of His loyal love toward His people.

### KEY TERMS AND IDEAS

- ✓ Faithfulness vs. Faithlessness
- ✓ Loyal love vs. Disloyalty
- ✓ Woman of Valor vs. Ruth "The Moabitess"
- ✓ Kinsman-Redeemer vs. "Piloni-Almoni"



**CULTURAL BACKGROUND**

Continued from page 1...

**The Dark days of the Judges**

The cultural milieu is described for us in the first verse, "Now it came about in the days when the judges governed..." This time period in Israel's history was replete with religious upheaval and socio-impropriety. The people of Israel repeatedly demonstrated their disloyalty to God's covenant with them, and, as a result the tribes were constantly engaged in battles and skirmishes with the surrounding nations and even among themselves (see Judges 20:29-21:8).

There was no cohesive unity among the people. Glancing back at Judges 21:25, we find God's description of the mess through the pen of Samuel, "In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes." This is the catch-all phrase for the period of the judges. The stories of Samson and the latter failings of Gideon should also come to mind. The central idea here, which is important for us to grasp, is this: *The people of Israel lived in disloyalty to God and His grace-giving covenant.*

**A Storyline Chart  
(From Naomi's Point-of-View)**

- I. From Bethlehem to Moab and Back Again (Chap. 1)**
  1. From the "House of Bread" to an Empty House (1:1-5)
  2. Issues with the in-laws and Ruth's loyalty (1:6-18)
  3. Sweet like Honey to Bitter old Grapefruit (1:19-22)
- II. A Glimmer of Hope in the Fields of a Farmer (Chap. 2)**
  1. Ruth's Loyal Care (2:1-3)
  2. Boaz' Caring Response (2:4-16)
  3. Purdy-good Pickens © (2:17-23)
- III. Hope turns toward Reality (Chap. 3)**
  1. "Matchmaker...make me a match" (3:1-5)
  2. The Midnight Meeting (3:6-13)
  3. Hope awaiting Fulfillment (3:14-18)
- IV. From Emptiness to Restoration (Chap. 4)**
  1. Mr. Piloni-Almoni (4:1-12)
  2. A Match made in Heaven... and a Child! (4:13-17)
  3. Grandfather to King David! (4:18-22)



The people of Moab were totally despised by the tribes of Israel.

Pictured at Left: Ruth, the Moabitess, gleaning in the fields of Boaz. Painting by Gustave Dore`

**VERSE BY VERSE NOTES:**

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**APPLICATIONS FOR TODAY:**

(Ask the question: So...what? What difference does this make in my life?)

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*"Adversity is often God's tool for shaping and developing character in His servants."*  
 - Dr. Richard Taylor