

# Ruth Guide for the Layperson

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Read the book of Ruth in the Old Testament. Then study each chapter separately and in order referring to the guide as needed and asking questions as exemplified in the guide to help you understand the text. It is meant to be a help to individuals, small groups and Sunday school classes.

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This book is dedicated to all who are searching for the truth

## Acknowledgments

It seems to me a lot of Christians are neglecting studying the bible book by book but rather they are focusing on topical studies, character studies, self-help books, etc. God gave us the bible in books for a reason. He wants us to delve deeply into each book of the bible, study and apply the material so transformation in our lives occurs. He wants us to be changed by the power of the Holy Spirit as we understand His Word and respond to it. There is no short cut to this and it requires discipline and commitment. In a lifetime, we will not be able to plumb the depths of God's Word, but we are to do the best we can now. We will likely have time in eternity to continue this quest, but for now we are to go about it fervently. The good news is we do not need to reinvent the wheel. There have been many that have gone before us studying, writing books and commentaries to help us on this journey. My layperson's guides are not commentaries, but an attempt to capture and make accessible a more refined understanding of the biblical text based on some of the better commentaries currently available. I am grateful for the OT Commentary Survey by Tremper Longman III and the NT Commentary Survey by D.A. Carson. These surveys of commentaries have made it easier for me to narrow down the resources I use. As a physician, I am trained to take a vast amount of medical literature and use it to help the layperson in front of me with their particular medical problems. As a seminary student (who may never finish my degree) I am attempting something similar in the spiritual realm to help individuals or groups to grow spiritually. I pray God uses these guides for the furtherance of His kingdom and His glory.

My three main resources for the book of Ruth were:

1. Hubbard's Commentary on Ruth in the New International Commentary on the Old Testament Series.
2. Block's Commentary on Ruth in the New American Commentary Series.
3. Paul Miller's book, "A Loving Life", copyright 2014 published by Crossway.

Though I do not use any direct quotes or footnotes from these resources, they helped frame my approach to the book and gave me specific ideas to the flow of the narrative.

**Outline**

- I. Naomi returns- Ruth chapter 1**
  
- II. Ruth meets Boaz- Ruth chapter 2**
  
- III. Ruth proposes- Ruth chapter 3**
  
- IV. A child is born- Ruth chapter 4**

Connecting the above themes for each chapter, we can put together a thesis statement for the book of Ruth as follows:

**After Naomi returned to Bethlehem, Ruth met Boaz, proposed to him, they got married and a child was born.**

### I. Naomi returns- Ruth chapter 1

Ruth is King David's great grandmother. This book's purpose was to gain favor for David's regime. It was possibly written during Solomon's reign. It is a narrative telling the history of part of David's ancestral line, which during the time of the judges experienced the events described in this book. A man named Elimelech, married to Naomi, had two sons named Mahlon and Chilion. They were Ephrathites (a tribe) in Bethlehem in the region of Judah. They fled to Moab because of a famine in their land. The results were disastrous. They lived there a decade. The two sons both married Moabite wives (which was not lawful for Jews). Elimelech and his sons eventually died. Jews understood from the Pentateuch (especially the Abraham and Isaac stories) that they were not to leave the Promised Land due to famine unless the Lord specifically directed them to do so. Perhaps God was judging Israel with a famine due to their disbelief seen in the book of Judges. Repentance and restoration could have followed without leaving Israel. The events in the book of Ruth likely occurred soon after Moab oppressed Israel. Also, based on the history of Israel with Moab, it appears Elimelech acted independently of the Lord's will. The city *Bethlehem* literally means 'house of bread' (notice the irony with a famine occurring in the 'house of bread').

The key word in chapter one is 'return' (*shuv*), which is found eleven times in vv. 6-22. What is the significance of Naomi's return? Naomi and the other two widows arise to return (v.6) from Moab to Judah (v.7) when they heard there was food back in Bethlehem. But Naomi urges her daughters-in-law Ruth and Orpah to return back to their mother's homes. Orpah goes back but Ruth clings to Naomi. After making a commitment to Naomi, her God and her people, Ruth pronounces a self-maledictory oath. How does Ruth's commitment in 1: 16-17 impact us from a gospel perspective?

Their return stirs up the whole town. Naomi is honest with her grief and disappointment with God. She is struggling with bitterness since God has brought her back empty and brought calamity to her. Yet there is hope. They return back to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest.

**II. Ruth Meets Boaz- Ruth chapter 2**

How do we see the Lord at work in this section and in our own lives? Ruth went out looking for favor and found it. God allowed her to find the part of the field belonging to Boaz. As God's ambassador, Boaz treated Ruth in a way befitting before the Lord. In spite of potential racial tension (Moabite is repeated in this chapter three times) Boaz overlooks Ruth's foreigner status and treats her in such a way that elevates her social standing (see Phil 2: 3-4). He also recognized her devotion and risk-taking sacrifices and praises her for it. God will answer the conversational prayer of blessing on this wonderful woman. God is often orchestrating his will in the exchanges of his people as he does here. Jesus said, 'whatever you do unto one of the least of these little ones you do unto me' (Mt. 25: 40). We are also to walk circumspectly, being sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit, being kind, compassionate, gracious and wise as opportunity permits (Col 4: 5). Through the hard work of Ruth in this one day and the generosity of Boaz, Ruth was able to glean two weeks of food. No wonder Naomi was so surprised and curious as to how Ruth pulled off such a feat. Naomi also recognized that Boaz was a potential redeemer, hinting to Ruth that he might be a good one to marry. That sets up the second half of the book. In the same way we are to recognize Jesus Christ as our redeemer and live for him.

In what ways do we see love (*hesed*) continue in chapter 2 and in our own lives? Ruth is depending on finding favor in v.2. We find the speech of Boaz gracious in v.4 as he reminds his workers the Lord is with them. He is encouraged three times with blessing-vv.4, 19, and 20. Ruth boldly asks for more than the standard gleaning allowance when she asked for permission to glean among the sheaves, and Boaz graciously grants her request. Beginning in v.8 when Boaz addresses Ruth, his speech is kind, gentle and sensitive to her needs: first her need for safety (vv.8-9), then thirst in v.9 (in spite of the usual custom of foreign woman fetching the water), and lastly hunger (vv.14-16). In v.10 Ruth acknowledges Boaz' kindness to her and her self-consciousness of her foreigner status. In verse 11 Boaz praises Ruth for the commitment she made to Naomi and the nation of Israel. Then he pronounces God's blessing of reward on her for all she has done. Ruth realizes she has found favor in the sight of Boaz (v.13). Do we sensitively look to meet the needs of others around us?

**III. Ruth proposes- Ruth chapter 3**

This chapter begins and ends (inclusio) with Naomi commanding Ruth and the idea of rest. The idea of rest is also found in Ruth 1: 9. The ‘man’ and ‘woman’ in verses 8, 14, 18 are incognito here. What was involved with Ruth proposing to Boaz here? Naomi wants what is best for Ruth. So she contrives a plan, knowing the routine at the threshing floor. In verse 3, she is communicating to Ruth to shed her widow’s clothes. The cloak was to keep warm, not a sexy dress. Naomi is sensitive to timing like a business person; she is also acting as a matchmaker like Yenta in ‘Fiddler on the Roof’. In verses 5-6 Ruth is obedient, like Esther in a later era. Ruth also goes beyond what Naomi intended by asking Boaz to abide by levirate law along with the responsibility to buy back land as the redeemer (*goel*)- bible references are given on the next page of the guide. She was more concerned about Naomi than herself. She calls herself a servant (*ama*) in verse 9 which refers to one eligible for marriage, not a lower-class servant (*sipha*) which she called herself in Ruth 2: 13. In verse 9 she challenges Boaz to be an answer to his own prayer ( Ruth 2: 12). Boaz responds favorably with grace and kindness because he is more concerned about the two women. He again blesses Ruth for her kindness of considering Naomi above herself. He comforts her with the standard phrase ‘do not fear’ in verse 11. After all, everyone knows Ruth is a worthy woman. She is worthy to be his wife, a peer of his, an Israelite and a mother of kings! The twist in verse 12 is there is a closer redeemer. But Boaz invokes a solemn oath that if it is possible, and the other is not willing, he will redeem. When Boaz tells Ruth to lie down until morning, he is perhaps communicating this: Ruth, be at peace, be safe, no drama, let’s be pure, be patient, I got this. The barley he gives her is like a dowry. God is working in and through the normal events of life.

How can we grow in our relationships with others? Put others first (Phil. 2). Speak graciously when possible (Col. 4: 5). We are to be honest, sensitive, transparent, tactful, and loving. We are to consider the Lord in all things and every interaction. As we walk in the power of the Holy Spirit, we watch for the needs of others. We consider God in the events of everyday life. It is fine to take risks and take initiative if we let wisdom guide us. We are to remain humble and exalt others. We are to encourage and be a blessing. Communicating with pure motives and appropriately in each situation is a part of maturity.

**IV. A child is born- Ruth chapter 4**

What is the significance of the court proceedings? Boaz does settle the matter that day. He takes initiative to gather the closer redeemer and the elders at the city gate, the place of official business. The narrator records Boaz as calling the man, '*peloni almoni*'. This wordplay written in Hebrew is called a farrago, where unrelated meaningless words combine to produce a new idiom. The equivalent in English would be 'so and so', or 'hey you'. Boaz likely did not call him that, but the narrator is making a point. The effect is to diminish our respect for the man who would not carry out his duty. He is a foil to Boaz. Of course, Boaz timed things perfectly. According to Lev. 25: 25-30 the land was to stay within the family. There was no downside to this aspect. Then unexpectedly Boaz invokes the levirate law from Deut. 25: 7 and the man was unwilling. Boaz had won the day and he had also won a wife.

What is the significance of the genealogy in the last five verses of the book? The community at the legal transaction spoke a word of blessing on Boaz and his new bride. She was to be like Leah and Rachel and he was to be like Perez, the son of Judah. After Ruth had the child Obed, the women of the town told Naomi that Obed was her redeemer (vv.14-15). Ruth had given Naomi the boy and she became his adopted mother. Ruth was better than seven sons, the ideal Israelite family. Obed eventually became the grandfather of King David. In this linear genealogy, Boaz is in the seventh place, or place of honor. David is in the tenth position- all the background in this book was pointing to the legitimacy of David's throne. The book of Ruth ties him to the patriarchs. But even King David was pointing to another. Will the real redeemer please stand. Is it Perez? Boaz? Obed? David? No, from the line of David will come the real redeemer, Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham (Matthew 1: 1). He is the one who redeems all those who believe in his substitutionary death and resurrection. In him, we find eternal life (1Jn. 5: 10-13). We are to put our faith in Christ and live for him.