

Aquifer Open Study Notes (Book Intros)

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This resource has been adapted into multiple languages, including English, Tok Pisin, Arabic (عربي), French (Français), Hindi (हिंदी), Indonesian (Bahasa Indonesia), Portuguese (Português), Russian (Русский), Spanish (Español), Swahili (Kiswahili), and Simplified Chinese (简体中文).

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Ruth

Ruth was a loyal daughter-in-law to Naomi, her mother-in-law who had lost her husband and sons. Boaz was a kind landowner and a close relative of Naomi. This story includes loss and loyalty, a return home, a secret meeting at midnight, a public transfer of property, a marriage, and a child. The book of Ruth tells a story of God's love in the lives of ordinary people.

Setting

The events in Ruth occurred around 1100 BC, during the time of the judges. While the book of Judges describes violent and important events, the book of Ruth emphasizes a calm and everyday life during that period.

During this time, Israel had limited political structures. People focused more on tribal and family ties than on national identity. Most families in Israel relied on their own crops and animals for food and other needs. Israel's hill country was productive, but the water supply varied. A few years of little rain could lead to people starving (famine or food crisis).

Summary

When a food crisis (famine) occurred in Bethlehem, Elimelech moved to Moab with his wife, Naomi, and their two sons. The sons married Moabite women. Elimelech died in Moab, and then the sons also died, leaving Naomi without support. Hearing that the famine in Bethlehem had ended, Naomi decided to return home. Ruth, one of Naomi's Moabite daughters-in-law, pledged her loyalty to Naomi.

They traveled together and arrived in Bethlehem at the start of the spring barley harvest. To get food for the year, Ruth went to collect bits of barley in Boaz's field. When Boaz learned who she was, he told his workers to be generous to Ruth.

Naomi heard about Boaz's kindness and sent Ruth to meet him privately one night at the floor where they beat the grain. Ruth asked Boaz to be her family "redeemer," which meant marrying her. Boaz knew a closer relative had the first right to be the family redeemer. But he promised to step in if that man refused. Boaz went to the town gate to settle the matter, and the other man declined. So, Boaz married Ruth, and she had a son named Obed.

Having a grandson guaranteed Naomi's security in her old age and restored what she thought was lost forever. Obed became the grandfather of David, Israel's greatest king. The book of Ruth concludes with a family line listing ten generations, from Perez, the son of Judah, to David.

Author

Some biblical scholars have questioned whether Ruth is a figure of history or fiction. However, as scholars learn more about ancient history, writing styles, and daily life in the Ancient Near East, they conclude that Ruth and other stories from Israel's early periods have their basis in history. We do not know who wrote Ruth, and archaeologists may never find direct evidence of Ruth, Boaz, and Naomi. But the story accurately reflects its time and place, supporting its basis in history.

Meaning and Message

God often acts through the ordinary events of daily life. Miracles happen, but God usually fulfills his plans and blesses people through regular events. By being loyal in daily life, we prepare ourselves to stay loyal during crises.

The book of Ruth includes several verbal blessings. God's people can bless each other in his name. We often help make these blessings come true, just as Naomi and Boaz did for Ruth.

Naomi felt abandoned by God, but God had not left her. By the end of the book, Naomi realized that God had given her more than she could have imagined. We can trust God even in our most difficult times.

Having faith in God means being willing to take risks. Ruth decided to follow Naomi's God despite great uncertainty. Boaz risked being loyal and generous, and he received great rewards.

Everyday actions can have a lasting impact. Ruth and Boaz showed loyalty in farming, marriage, childbirth, and parenting. Their actions led to blessings through King David and ultimately, the descent of his greatest relative, Jesus Christ.