

Ruth

1. Summary – In the days of the Judges, an Israelite man Elimelech and his wife Naomi flee to Moab because of a famine in Israel. Their two sons marry Moabite women. The sons die, and Naomi returns to Israel with Ruth, one of her daughters-in-law. Ruth finds favor in the eyes of Boaz as she gleans in his fields. As a kinsman-redeemer, Boaz takes her as his wife. Their son becomes the grandfather of David and thus an ancestor of Christ.
2. Author and date – The author of Ruth is not explicitly stated. Traditionally, the book was attributed to Samuel, but others believe he lived too early to explain the historical cues in the book. It must have been written after the monarchy was established, as the book begins with “in the days when the judges ruled,” which implies that at the time of writing this is no longer the case. Also, this introduction indicates that the events themselves occur during the time period described by the book of Judges. The conclusion of the book with David’s genealogy indicates that at least one purpose of the book was to affirm David’s rule. Therefore, many have concluded that the book was composed during the time of Saul or early in the reign of David.
3. Character of the book:
 - a. In our Bibles, Ruth is placed chronologically, but in the Hebrew Scriptures it is considered among the Writings, the third division of the Hebrew Scriptures. Its primary purpose is not merely historical.
 - b. Ruth is not overtly polemical (arguing a point) either. Instead, it tells a story and gently draws the reader to discover certain truths.
 - c. The book is rich in dialogue and literary excellence – succinctly telling a story while skillfully developing the characters. There are no villains in Ruth. For these reasons, some have drawn the conclusion that the book is fiction. However, a historical story can entertain as well as instruct, and there is no reason to believe Ruth is anything else.
4. Structure (from Hill and Walton):
 - a. Elimelech’s family leaves Israel and experiences tragedy. (1:1-5)
 - b. Naomi and Ruth return to Bethlehem. (1:6-22)
 - c. Ruth meets Boaz. (ch. 2)
 - d. Naomi forms a plan, and it succeeds. (ch. 3)
 - e. Ruth and Boaz marry and bear a son. (4:1-17)
 - f. The genealogy of Perez leads to David. (4:18-22)
5. Major themes and events:
 - a. God was still at work in the lives of people during the dark days of the Judges. Faith is kept alive in the lives of ordinary people and their families. Ruth explains for us how the strong faith of David did not appear out of nowhere but was cultivated through the faithfulness of his family.
 - b. God uses faithfulness in human relationships to advance his purposes. Ruth is a model of faithfulness to Naomi, and Boaz is in turn a model of faithfulness to Ruth. This faithfulness reflects and foreshadows God’s faithfulness in providing for his own and advancing his redemptive purposes.
 - c. The kinsman-redeemer is an important concept in Ruth. The obligation of the kinsman-redeemer seems to be a principle derived from two specific laws: 1) If a family became impoverished and had to sell their land, their nearest relative was to buy it back (Lev. 25:23-55). 2) If a man died with no offspring, his brother was to marry the woman and produce offspring in the name of his brother (Deut. 25:5-10). While Boaz was not the brother of Ruth’s deceased husband, this obligation may reflect a general application of the moral principles embodied in these laws. In this sense, Boaz is a pattern of Christ’s redeeming love for his people.

References:

- An Introduction to the Old Testament*, R. B. Dillard and T. Longman III, Zondervan, 1994.
A Survey of the Old Testament, A. E. Hill and J. H. Walton, Zondervan, 1991.
Faithful God: An Exposition of the Book of Ruth, Sinclair Ferguson, Bryntirion, 2005.