

## Study Questions on Ruth

### Introduction to Ruth

1. This book is a historical narrative. The basic building block of this kind of literature, which includes plays and novels, is the “scene.” A scene is a section of the text with the same characters, at the same location, and the same time. If either characters, location, or time changes, we have a new scene.
  - (a) Read over the book, and see if you recognize the successive scenes.
  - (b) Some of the scenes are very similar to one another.
    - i. See if you can identify these similar
    - ii. Can you recognize any symmetrical patterns among the scenes?
2. The events of the book occur “in the days when the judges ruled” (1:1). You might like to review the chronological analysis of the book of Judges presented in the first few pages of [https://cyber-chapel.org/sermons/judges/notes/Judg\\_1012.pdf](https://cyber-chapel.org/sermons/judges/notes/Judg_1012.pdf).
  - (a) How long a period does this cover?
  - (b) How many generations does the book name that cover this same period? (Compare 4:18-22 with Matt 1:5-6.)
  - (c) What is surprising about these two answers, and how might you resolve this anomaly? See notes on Matthew 1 (<https://cyber-chapel.org/sermons/matt/notes/Matt1.pdf>).
3. Look at a Bible atlas or other map of the Levant in Bible times to locate Bethlehem, Moab, and two other places that are relevant to the context: Gaza, and Ophrah (Ephrah) in the tribe of Manasseh.

### 1:1-22, From Pleasant to Bitter

#### :1-7, End of a Family

1. Review the history of the Judges. Can you find a period that was marked by famine in Israel, when these events might have happened?
2. Hebrew names have meanings, and the meanings of the names in these verses (Elimelech, Naomi, Mahlon, Chilion, Ephratah, Orpah, Ruth) are suggestive of the details of the story, as Naomi herself suggests in 1:20. Look up these names in a Bible dictionary like Smith’s.
3. What alternatives does the writer suggest with the expression at the end of v. 2, “continued there”?
4. What does the law of Moses have to say about the decisions of Naomi’s sons in 1:4? See Deuteronomy 7 and 23.
5. See if you can detect the chiasmic structure in 1:1-7. Note in particular:

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- (a) What event appears at the center of the chiasm?
- (b) What contrast is implied by the outer two members of the chiasm?

### **:8-19a, Dialog on the Road**

1. This section is an extended dialog between Naomi and her daughters.
  - (a) Identify the changes from one speaker to another.
  - (b) Notice the length of the successive sections of the dialog. Who dominates in each exchange?

### **:8-9a, Naomi's Proposal**

1. Compare the verbs in 7b and 8a.
  - (a) What destinations are in view in each case? Note the shifting destinations in view for these verbs throughout this dialog.
  - (b) How is Naomi applying the lesson that the Lord is teaching her?
  - (c) What NT texts can you recall that warn about her attitude?
2. Use your Bible software (or hint a) to find other instances of the phrase “mother’s house” (1:8) in the Bible, and compare Gen 24:67.
  - (a) How common is this phrase compared with “father’s house”?
  - (b) What common theme is associated with the phrase each time it appears?
3. Use Strong’s numbers to explore the meaning, and use elsewhere in Scripture, of the word “kindly” (H2617) in 1:8.
  - (a) How is the term usually translated?
  - (b) Where else is the Lord said to exhibit this attribute?
  - (c) Which of the girls is said to behave this way?
  - (d) Where else in the book is this word used?
4. Hints
  - (a) Gen 24:28; Song 3:4; 8:2

### **:9b-14a, The Girls' Protest and Naomi's Response**

1. Observe the inclusio that marks off this section between 9b and 14a.
2. Notice the contrast in destinations associated with the verb “return” in 10 and “turn again” in v. 11 (both H7725).
3. Naomi envisions only one way that they could regain normal family lives by following her, which she describes in 1:11-12. She is referring to a custom described in Genesis 38 and Deuteronomy 25, which also forms the background to Ruth’s appeal to Boaz in Ruth 3. Review the descriptions in Genesis and Deuteronomy to see what Naomi has in mind.

## **:14b-18, The Final Interchange**

1. How does this exchange differ from the earlier ones in the dialog?
2. Ruth's behavior is contrasted with Orpah's. Study the verb that describes what Ruth did. Where does it first appear in the Bible, and what associations does it have? Use Strong's numbers, or Hint a.
3. Compare 1:9 with 1:15.
  - (a) What aspect of the decision of Ruth and Orpah is brought into focus here for the first time?
  - (b) How does Ruth reflect this choice in 1:16-17?
4. The head god of Moab was called Chemosh.
  - (a) Look him up in your Bible software (or hint b) and a Bible dictionary.
  - (b) 2 Kings 3 describes a sacrifice by Mesha, king of Moab. What was it?
5. We will discuss numerous parallels between the story of Naomi and Ruth, and that of Naaman the Syrian in 2 Kings 5. How many can you find?
6. Observe the parallel between 1:19 and 1:7.
7. Hints
  - (a) "Cleave" Strong's H1692 appears for the first time in Gen 2:24.
  - (b) He is named in Num. 21:29; Judg. 11:24; 1 Kings 11:7, 33; 2 Kings 23:13; Jer. 48:7, 13, 46.

## **:19b-22, Naomi's Report**

1. What play on words is Naomi making in 1:20?
2. What is Naomi's assessment of the Lord's attitude toward her in 1:20-21? Compare 1:13.
  - (a) How many statements does Naomi make about the Lord in these verses?
  - (b) What name does she use for the Lord in each of these statements, and how does she organize them?
  - (c) Use Strong's numbers (or Hint a) to find other places that the Hebrew word translated "Almighty" is used of God.
    - i. What book uses this name most often, and how is this book like Ruth?
    - ii. Can you find any consistent scenario behind the various places where this name appears?
    - iii. How is this scenario relevant to Ruth?
  - (d) If you were Naomi's friend and trying to encourage her, how would you respond to each of her complaints? Can you find factual errors in what she says? Is there a verse of Scripture you might give her for each complaint?

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3. In v. 22, the closest antecedent for “which” (a feminine singular pronoun) is “Ruth the Moabitess.” How could she be said to “return” to Bethlehem, when she had never been there before? (Could Genesis 13 have something to do with this language?)
4. Where does barley harvest fall in the agricultural year? Exod 9:31.
5. What else is going on at the start of the grain harvest? Leviticus 23.
6. What significance is there in the timing of Naomi’s return, and her attitude, compared with her old townspeople?
7. Hints:
  - (a) Gen. 17:1; 28:3; 35:11; 43:14; 48:3; 49:25; Ex. 6:3; Num. 24:4, 16; Is. 13:6; Ezek. 1:24; 10:5; Joel 1:15; Psa. 68:14; 91:1; Job 5:17; 6:4, 14; 8:3, 5; 11:7; 13:3; 15:25; 21:15, 20; 22:3, 17, 23, 25-26; 23:16; 24:1; 27:2, 10-11, 13; 29:5; 31:2, 35; 32:8; 33:4; 34:10, 12; 35:13; 37:23; 40:2; Ruth 1:20-21

## Lessons from Ruth 1

1. Read back over Ruth chapter 1. Try to think of a few practical lessons that it teaches us. Can you find a text elsewhere in the Bible that brings each of your lessons into focus?

## 2:1-23, Short-Term Security

1. How would you divide this chapter into sections?
2. Can you detect a chiasm based on scene changes?

### :1, Introducing Boaz

1. How does 2:1 qualify the relation of Naomi to Boaz? Is he her relative?

### :2, Naomi and Ruth at Home

1. Ruth proposes to provide food for Naomi and herself by gleaning.
  - (a) Use the Treasury (or Hint a) to find where Moses provided for this mode of charity in the law.
  - (b) Use your Bible SW (or Hint b) to find how this verb is distributed in the OT. Where is it most common?
  - (c) What basic principles of caring for the poor can you derive from these passages?
  - (d) Given the support for this practice in the law, why does Ruth ask Naomi’s permission to glean?
2. We will talk about the process of harvesting grain, and the place of gleaners in this process (“after the reapers,” 2:3).
  - (a) See how much you can learn about the harvesting process from Ps 129:7; Deut 24:19; Matt 13:30.

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(b) When were the gleaners free to begin their work?

### 3. Hints

(a) Lev 19, 23; Deut 24

(b) H3950 appears in Gen. 31:46; 47:14; Ex. 16:4-5, 16-18, 21-22, 26-27; Lev. 19:9-10; 23:22; Num. 11:8; Judg. 1:7; 11:3; 1 Sam. 20:38; 2 Kings 4:39; Is. 17:5; 27:12; Jer. 7:18; Psa. 104:28; Ruth 2:2-3, 7-8, 15-19, 23; Song 6:2

## :3-18a, Ruth and Boaz in the Field

1. See if you can find the chiasmic structure in these verses.
2. Use your Bible SW (or hint c) to explore the meaning of the word “hap” in 2:3.
3. How does this story illustrate Prov 16:33?
4. What does 2:4 show about the character of Boaz?
5. What does the overseer emphasize about Ruth in 2:6?
6. How does Boaz’s knowledge about Ruth (2:11) explain his response to 2:6?
7. The Hebrew at the end of 2:7 is extremely twisted, as though the overseer is getting confused and having a hard time putting a sentence together. Can you think why he might suddenly find himself at a loss for words?
  - (a) What apprehensions might he have had in reporting Ruth’s presence in the field?
  - (b) What apprehensions might he have had when he sees Boaz’s response to his report?
8. Use Strong’s numbers (or hint b) to find where the verb “abide fast by” (2:8) appears elsewhere in Ruth.
  - (a) Where did we see it before?
  - (b) What meanings did it suggest, based on Gen 2:24?
  - (c) What hint does it convey here?
9. Focus on the chiasmic interchange between Ruth and Boaz at the center of this section (2:10-13).
  - (a) What is the relation between “find grace in thine eyes” (10) and “find favour in thy sight” (13)? How are they related to “find grace in ... sight” in 2:2? (Use Strong’s numbers, or Hint c).
  - (b) In Ruth’s view,
    - i. What is the source of the blessing she seeks?
    - ii. What is the basis on which she requests it?
  - (c) Now focus on the words of Boaz in 11-12.
    - i. What is the source of the blessing that he gives her?
    - ii. What basis does he cite for wishing this blessing on her?

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- (d) Think about the contrast between their perspectives on source and basis of blessing. What reasons are there for this contrast? What lessons might it teach us?
10. Compare 2:14 with 2:9b. What progression is the narrator emphasizing?
11. Compare 2:15-16 with 2:8-9a. What progression do you see here?
12. How big is an ephah (2:17)?
- (a) Use the web (or hint d) to find how large the ephah was in modern terms.
  - (b) Exod 16:16-36 define the ephah in terms of a smaller measure, the omer. How many omers in an ephah?
  - (c) How many people could an omer feed for a day, according to Exodus 16?
13. Hints
- (a) H4745 appears in 1 Sam. 6:9; 20:26; Ruth 2:3; Eccl. 2:14-15; 3:19; 9:2-3
  - (b) H1692 appears in Ruth in 1:14; 2:8, 21, 23
  - (c) The three expressions are the same in Hebrew.
  - (d) Estimates vary from 22 liters (0.62 bushels) to 35 liters (1 bushel). It was large enough that a woman could credibly curl up in it (Zech 5:5-8).

## :18b-23, Naomi and Ruth at Home

1. What is Naomi's response when she sees how much food Ruth has brought home (2:19)?
2. Compare her response when she learns the name of the benefactor, in 2:20.
  - (a) Note the structural parallel between the blessings in 2:19 and 20.
  - (b) Whose kindness is in view in 2:20?
  - (c) Use Strong's numbers (or Hint a) to find other passages in Ruth that refer to "kindness."
  - (d) This word often refers to fulfillment of family responsibilities. How does this explain the rest of Naomi's comments in 2:20?
3. Naomi goes on to describe Boaz with two words that recall Israel's property law.
  - (a) "Near of kin" קרוב *qarob* H7138 recalls Num 27:8-11 (27:11 "his kinsman that is **next** to him"). What kind of situation does this passage regulate?
  - (b) "Kinsman" גֹּאֵל *go'el* H1350 recalls Lev 25:25, 47-49 (where it is translated "redeem"). What kind of situation does this passage regulate?
  - (c) Why is Naomi so excited about a person with these qualifications?
4. Compare 2:21 with 2:8.
  - (a) Use Strong's numbers (or hint b) to appreciate the parallel between these verses.
  - (b) How is 2:21 an advance on 2:8, and what additional benefit does it give Ruth?
5. Hints:

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- (a)  $\text{חָסֵד}$  *xesed* H2617 appears elsewhere in Ruth in 1:8 (“deal kindly” = “do *xesed*”) and 3:10 (“show more kindness” = “improve *xesed*”).
- (b) Both verses instruct Ruth to “cleave, stick close to” ( $\text{דָּבַק}$  *dabaq* H1692) someone.

### 3:1-18, Permanent Security

#### :1-5, Home: Ruth Accepts Naomi’s Plan

1. What is Naomi’s objective for Ruth in 3:1?
2. Compare 1:9. How does she envision this objective being realized?
3. What qualification of Boaz does Naomi emphasize in 3:2?
4. The sequence of events in the first part of 3:3 appears also in 2 Sam 12:20. What does this parallel suggest about the significance of these events?
5. The series of instructions in 3:3-4 are clearly intended to encourage Boaz to marry Ruth.
  - (a) How were marriages usually arranged in the OT? Compare Genesis 24, Genesis 29, and Exodus 2.
  - (b) Why might Boaz have been hesitant about initiating the discussion?
  - (c) Why might Naomi have been reluctant to approach Boaz directly on behalf of Ruth?

#### :6-15, Threshing Floor: Ruth and Boaz

1. Use Strong’s numbers (or hint a) to find the difference in meaning between “sayest” (3:5) and “bade” (3:6). What does this show about Ruth’s attitude toward her mother’s instructions?
2. What is new in Ruth’s answer to Boaz’s question in 3:9?
3. Note the use of “spread the skirt over” someone in 3:9. Use the Treasury (or hint b) to find another instance of this idiom. What is Ruth asking Boaz to do?
4. Ruth justifies her request by citing Boaz’s relation to her as “near kinsman,” literally “a redeemer.” The work of the redeemer is described in Lev 25:25, 47-49. What does this institution have to do with marriage? To see the logic of her request, consider the Hebrew laws concerning inheritance (Num 27:8-11) and the marriage of heiresses (Num 36:6-7). You may also want to review the law of levirate (brother-in-law) marriage (Deut 25:5-6), sometimes used to explain Ruth’s marriage to Boaz, and think about why it might not apply.
5. In describing Ruth’s suggestion (3:10), Boaz describes her attitude as showing kindness ( $\text{חָסֵד}$  *xesed* H2617).
  - (a) Use Strong’s numbers (or hint c) to find where else in Ruth this term is used. What do the three instances have in common?

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- (b) This term is frequently used to describe God's attitude toward his people (e.g., Exod 34:6-7 "goodness"; Psa 106:1 "mercy"). What NT description of God does this term anticipate?
6. Compare and contrast the words of Ruth to Naomi (3:5) with those of Boaz to Ruth (3:11). The verbs (sayest, requirest) are the same.
- (a) What is different about the emphasis in each case?
- (b) How do these two statements illustrate Eph 5:21?
- (c) How do the distinct responsibilities of Ruth and Boaz anticipate the mutual submission described in the three household roles described in Eph 5:22-6:9 (with parallels in Col 3:18-4:1)?
7. Use your concordance (or hint d) to find where else the expression "virtuous woman" appears in the Bible. Can you suggest a relationship between the three instances?
8. Hint:
- (a) "sayest" אמר *amar* H559: "to say (used with great latitude)"  
"bade" צוה *tsavah* H6680: "to constitute, enjoin: - appoint, (for-) bid. (give a charge, (give a, give in, send with) command (-er, ment), send a messenger, put, (set) in order."
- (b) Ezek 16:8
- (c) 1:8; 2:20
- (d) Prov 12:4; 31:10

## **:16-18, Home: Naomi and Ruth Debrief**

1. Naomi's question to Ruth in 3:16 is an echo of Isaac's question to Jacob in Gen 27:18. Why might the story of Isaac and his sons have occurred to Naomi at this point?
2. How does Naomi's counsel to Ruth with regard to Boaz in 3:18 correspond to the attitude we should have toward our Lord, our heavenly Boaz? See if you can collect some encouraging parallels using the Treasury of Scripture Knowledge (or hint a).
3. Hints:
- (a) Exo 14:13; 2 Chr 20:17; Psa 46:10; Isa 30:15

## **4:1-22, Redemption and Fulness**

1. Compare and contrast this chapter with chapter 1. How many parallels or contrasts can you identify?
2. How would you divide the chapter, based on changes in scene (characters, location, time)?



## :1-12, Boaz and the Elders

1. Use your Bible software (or Hint a) to find other references to things happen “in the gate.” What sorts of activities take place there in Bible times?
2. What is unusual about Boaz’s address to the other redeemer in 4:2, in view of the narrator’s usual practices?
3. Boaz is redeeming a field that Naomi is selling.
  - (a) How does this differ from the form of intervention by the redeemer envisioned in Lev 25:25?
  - (b) Which of these two patterns of redemption occurs in Jer 32:6-10?
4. The reference to “raising up the name of the dead” in 4:5 has been compared to the purpose of levirate marriage in Deut 25:6, “that his name be not put out of Israel.” Does this show that the marriage of Ruth and Boaz is a levirate marriage?
  - (a) To what is “the name of the dead” attached in each of these cases?
  - (b) Whose name is perpetuated by Ruth’s first son, according to 4:18-22?
5. Think about the objection raised by the nearer redeemer in 4:6.
  - (a) How would the addition of Ruth to the deal mar his inheritance?
    - i. Think about the purpose of marrying Ruth, according to 4:5.
    - ii. If he does not marry Ruth, whose name will be on his inheritance?
  - (b) What is ironic about his objection here, in view of the name Boaz gives him in 4:2?
6. Give some thought to the shoe symbol used to confirm the transaction in 4:7-8. This symbol is sometimes thought to reflect the levirate law in Deut 25:7-10.
  - (a) There are serious differences between what happens in Deuteronomy 25 and the shoe symbol here. How many can you find?
  - (b) Can you suggest an alternative meaning for Ruth 4:7-8, based on passages like Gen 13:17; Deut 1:35; 11:24; Jos 1:3; 14:9?
7. The elders proclaim a threefold blessing on Boaz and Ruth in 4:11-12.
  - (a) What are the three blessings?
  - (b) How are the first and third similar to one another, and different from the central one?
  - (c) Look up the histories of the patriarchal families in the first and third blessings, using the Treasury (or hint b). What characteristics of each of them may the elders have in mind, in making them the focus of their blessing?
  - (d) How might the second blessing serve as a hinge between these two examples?
8. Hints:
  - (a) Deut 21:19; 22:15; 2 Sam 19:8; Prov 22:22; Amos 5:15
  - (b) Gen 29-30; 38

## **:13-17, Naomi and the Townswomen**

1. Consider the emphasis on the Lord's agency in 4:13. How may the union of Boaz and Ruth be like those of Abraham and Sarah, or Isaac and Rebekah, or Jacob and Rachel?
2. The women of Bethlehem appear in the story only in 4:14-17 and 1:19-21 (where the verb forms indicate that Naomi is talking to the women). How do these two sections correspond to one another?
3. Use Strong's numbers (or Hint a) to find where the term "nourish" in 4:15 appears in earlier Scripture, and trace the parallels between the story where it appears earlier and this story.
4. Hints:
  - (a) Earlier instances of H3557 appear in Gen 45:11; 47:12; 50:21.

## **:18-22, Beginning of a Royal Line in Israel**

1. Recall Deut 23:3. How could David, fewer than ten generations from Ruth, be king, in light of Deut 17:15?
2. Compare the genealogy in 4:18-22 with Matt 1:3-6.
  - (a) What additional detail does Matthew add?
  - (b) How might this detail have made Boaz more willing to take Ruth as his wife?

## **Summary**

1. Summarize each chapter of the book of Ruth in a single sentence.
2. Now summarize the entire book in a single sentence.