

Ruth

Ruth is a beautiful “interlude of love” set in the period of the judges in Israel - an era marked by immorality, idolatry, and war. This heartwarming story of devotion and faithfulness records the life of Ruth, a Moabite widow who leaves her homeland to go with her widowed Jewish mother-in-law in Bethlehem. God honors her commitment by guiding her to the field of Boaz (a near kinsman) where she gathers grain and eventually finds a husband! The book closes with a brief genealogy in which Boaz’s name is prominent as the great-grandfather of King David, through whom would come the Christ.

INTRODUCTION

Ruth is a cameo story of love, devotion, and redemption set in the dark context of the days of the judges. It is the story of a Moabite woman who forsakes her pagan heritage to cling to the people of Israel and to the God of Israel. Because of her faithfulness in a time of national faithlessness, God rewards her by giving her a new husband (Boaz), a son (Obed), and a privileged position in the lineage of David and Christ (she is the great-grandmother of David).

Ruth is the Hebrew title of this book. This name may be a Moabite modification of the Hebrew word *reuit*, meaning “friendship or association.”

AUTHOR

The author of Ruth is not given anywhere in the book, nor is it known from any other biblical passage. Talmudic tradition attributes it to Samuel but this is unlikely since David appears in Ruth (4:17, 22), and Samuel died before David’s coronation (1 Sam. 25:1). Ruth was probably written during David’s reign since Solomon’s name is not included in the genealogy. The anonymity of the book, however, should not detract from its spiritual value or literary beauty.

DATE & SETTING

Ruth divides neatly into four distinct settings: (1) the country of Moab (1:1–18); (2) a field in Bethlehem (1:19–2:23); (3) a threshing floor in Bethlehem (3:1–18); and (4) the city of Bethlehem (4:1–22).

The setting of the first eighteen verses is Moab, a region northeast of the Dead Sea. The Moabites, descendants of Lot, worship Chemosh and other pagan gods. Scripture records two times when they fight against Israel (see Judg. 3:12–30; 1 Sam. 14:47). Ruth takes place about two centuries after the first war and approximately eighty years before it is recorded.

Ruth 1:1 gives the setting of the remainder of the book: “Now it came to pass, in the days when the judges ruled.” This is a time of apostasy, warfare, decline, violence, moral decay, and anarchy. Ruth provides a cameo of the other side of the story - the godly remnant who remain true to the laws of God.

Because Ruth is written more to tell a beautiful story than to give all the historical facts of that period, the assignment of time is somewhat difficult.