

RUTH

INTRODUCTION

Structure. Symmetrical balance is a key feature in the structure of Ruth. The brief opening account which summarizes the distress of Naomi (1:1-5) comprises only 71 words in Hebrew. The closing section of the book which relates Naomi's migration from emptiness to fullness (4:13-17) is also recorded in just 71 words. The turning point in the story (when hope begins to dawn for Naomi, 2:20) is at the midpoint of the book.

Contrasts are also used effectively, particularly with regard to the main theme of Naomi's fortunes. When she returns from Moab she uses the contrasts between Naomi (pleasant) and Mora (bitter) and full and empty (1:20, 21) to describe her change in fortune.

Occasion. At the outset (1:1) and *via* the genealogy at the end (4:13-22), it is clear that the time frame of the *events* of the book is the period of the Judges. The book of Judges itself raises doubts about the existence of even a remnant in Israel which the book of Ruth seems to answer. However, this work goes beyond the establishment of the fact that God had preserved a Righteous remnant in Israel and even beyond the question of the origin of David. In a microcosm the book of Ruth demonstrates the need for, and God's ability to provide, one who can rescue from hopelessness.

Message Statement. Just as Boaz rescued the lives of Naomi and Ruth from hopelessness and family extinction so also their story offers promise that God can provide a kinsman redeemer who can rescue the whole nation from spiritual extinction. On an even grander scale, the life of David, to whom this short book points, promises an even greater kinsman whose redemption will extend beyond national borders. Thus the message of the book seems to be: *God's provision of a Kinsman Redeemer makes empty lives full.*

SURVEY

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| 1A | INTRODUCTION: NAOMI EMPTIED This introductory section describes the hopeless state of Naomi. Although she at one time had the present security of a husband and the future hope of descendants through her two sons, she was now left hopeless. She found herself without the security of a husband or sons, alone in a foreign land with only two childless widows from Moab as her family. All hope for protection, support, and continuation of the family line was gone. | 1:1-5 |
| 2A | NAOMI RETURNS FROM MOAB In a state of despair, Naomi returns to Israel with the hope, but no promise, of being filled. This section provides a test of the loyalty of Ruth toward Naomi and YHWH. | 1:6-22 |
| 1B | <i>Ruth Shows Her Loyalty to Naomi</i> Orpah's understandable decision to remain in Moab serves as a foil highlighting Ruth's faithfulness. As an example of worldly enticement Orpah remained in Moab and became a successful TV talk-show host whose weight loss programs became nationally known. | 1:6-18 |
| 2B | <i>Ruth and Naomi Return to Israel</i> | 1:19-22 |

Ruth's insistence on making Naomi's people and God her own, and the oath by YHWH which she takes indicate her trust in God. As the pair arrives back in Israel Naomi expresses her condition twice. She tells her friends to call her "Mara" (bitter) instead of "Naomi" (pleasant) (1:20), and then states "I went away full but the Lord has brought me back empty" (1:21).

- 3A RUTH AND BOAZ MEET IN THE HARVEST FIELDS 2:1-23
In a touching story of compassion Boaz meets and voluntarily cares for Ruth. His actions toward her bespeak concern in any culture. As before, the author announces the theme of the chapter in the first verse.
- 1B *Ruth Begins Work* 2:1-7
According to Jewish law Ruth goes into the fields to glean the left-overs from Boaz's field hands. Apparently Boaz's character is appreciated even by his workers (2:4).
- 2B *Boaz Shows Kindness to Ruth* 2:8-16
The message of this section is Boaz's voluntary and extra-ordinary care of Ruth. His invitation for her to glean in his fields, (2:8); provision of a lunch meal, (2:14); and directions to his workers to leave extra grain for her and not to rebuke or embarrass her (2:16), demonstrate concern for her total welfare.
- 3B *Ruth Returns to Naomi* 2:17-23
The news of Boaz's favor to Ruth gives new hope to Naomi. Indeed, this, the center of the book, is the turning point in Naomi's fortunes. Boaz's kindness offers tangible hope for Ruth's emptiness. 2:20 is actually the physical center point of the book as well.
- 4A RUTH GOES TO BOAZ AT THE THRESHING FLOOR 3:1-18
According to Naomi's instructions Ruth follows up on Boaz's kindness and, by her actions, asks him to act as a redeemer.
- 1B *Naomi Instructs Ruth* 3:1-6
It was customary for the land owner to remain by the grain at the threshing floor to protect his investment during the harvest. Naomi's instructions to lie down by Boaz were not an attempt at seduction (for Ruth's character continues to be blameless, [3:6]), but an appropriate proposal of marriage.
- 2B *Boaz Promises to Redeem* 3:7-14
Boaz's response is positive yet guarded. He agrees to redeem her providing that the one kinsman who is nearer refuses his responsibility.
- 3B *Ruth Returns to Naomi* 3:15-18
In the midst of a secretive and significant encounter at the threshing floor Boaz curiously insists that Ruth not return to her mother-in-law empty handed, filling her

shawl with barley. The author weaves this incident into the empty-full motif of the book, showing that at every encounter with the kinsman, the *empty* are made *full*.

5A BOAZ REDEEMS AND MARRIES RUTH 4:1-12

Boaz exercises his right of kinsman redeemer after the nearer kinsman refuses. The civil and legal procedures he goes through in this section would seem unremarkable and hardly worth noticing (even to the point of being a distraction to the real point of the story) if we did not have the background of the book of Judges to provide some context for Boaz's actions here. Knowing the story of Judges and how powerful men behaved there, imagine how a lesser man might have achieved Boaz's goals in this situation.

1B *Refusal of the Next of Kin* 4:1-8

According to custom Boaz goes through the proper channels to obtain the right to redeem Ruth. The nearer kinsman refuses, thus providing a foil for Boaz. His grace and favor are emphasized by the unnamed kinsman's refusal to help.

2B *Redemption of Ruth by Boaz* 4:9-12

Boaz announces his redemption of the line of Elimelech and married Ruth. The prophetic response of the elders is that Ruth's offspring might build Israel and that Boaz might become famous in Israel. The elders' final statement compares this union to the ancestral kinsman-redeemer of Judah.

6A CONCLUSION: NAOMI FILLED 4:13-17

This section balances that of the introduction (1:1-5). At this point Naomi receives back all and more than she lost. She rejoices with her friends with whom she had previously lamented. The *bitter one* has become *pleasant* once again and the *empty one* has been *filled*. This section also serves to climax the immediate story of Naomi, Ruth and Boaz.

GENEALOGY OF DAVID 4:18-22

The final section, a genealogy, lifts the story from an individual level to a higher national level with the emphasis on David. As Boaz had rescued the line of Elimelech and the lives of Ruth and Naomi, so also David would rescue the nation from the near spiritual extinction of the period of the Judges. And on yet another level, David's life and actions give promise of the ultimate Kinsman who would redeem all *spiritually empty* people, making their lives *full*.

Progress?

Feel?

Women?

Personal

National

God

God's Image: Rational, Relational, Physical/Sexual, Rulers

Not-God