

Ruth 1–4

It is unusual for a book of the Old Testament to be known by the name of a **Moabite woman who was not of Jewish descent**. Ruth, a virtuous and faithful woman, was abundantly blessed by the Lord, the God of Israel. Ruth's husband was an Israelite. While Ruth was living in Moab with her husband and her widowed mother-in-law, **Naomi**, her husband died. When Naomi decided to return to Jerusalem, Ruth remained faithful to her mother-in-law and to the God of her deceased husband and went with Naomi to Jerusalem.

God blessed Ruth, and she became a model of **faithfulness and loyalty**. There she became the wife of **Boaz**, a wealthy relative of her deceased husband. Through this, her name was included in the **genealogical line of David and in the genealogy of Jesus**. Thus, the story of Ruth gives us an indication that **God's plan of salvation is universal**, extending beyond the boundaries of Israel.

The period described in the narrative covers approximately **twelve years before the beginning of Saul's monarchy**, toward the end of the period of the Judges, around **1100 BC**. The geographical background of the book includes **Moab; Israel; the barley fields of Bethlehem in Judah; the threshing floors of Bethlehem; the city gates of Israel; and the house of Boaz in Bethlehem**.

The central theme of the **first part** of the book is Ruth's dedication of her life to **Naomi and to Naomi's God**. The central theme of the **second part** is Ruth's commitment of her life to **Boaz and to the God of Israel**.

Eleven Important Hebrew Words and Expressions

1. Ruth 1:1 — (*Ra'ab*) — “Famine”. It is a noun meaning “famine” or “food scarcity.” **The story of Ruth begins with a famine in Bethlehem. There is a striking irony here: the name Bethlehem means “House of Bread,” yet at the beginning of the story there is no bread in Bethlehem.**

Parallel References : Genesis 12:10 — **famine in the land**; Genesis 26:1 — **famine in the land**; 2 Kings 8:1 — **famine in the land**; Amos 8:11 — **a famine for hearing the word of the LORD**

Exegetical Significance: The famine in the Book of Ruth is not merely an economic problem. It provides the **background for departure and return** in the narrative. Because of the famine, Elimelech's family leaves Bethlehem for Moab; later, Naomi returns to Bethlehem when she hears that the LORD has given food to his people.

2. Ruth 1:6–22 — *Shuv* — “To Return”: it means “**to return, turn back, go back, or come back.**” The verb and its various forms occur repeatedly in Ruth 1:6–22.

Naomi returns from Moab to **Bethlehem**. However, the concept of “return” in Ruth is greater than a merely geographical movement. In Ruth, *shuv* suggests not only a physical return but also a **return to one's community, former life, relationships, and experience of God's providential care**.

Parallel References : Genesis 18:10 — “I will surely return to you”; Deuteronomy 30:2–3 — returning to God; 1 Samuel 7:3 — returning to the LORD; Joel 2:12–13 — “Return to me with all your heart”

Exegetical Significance

The repeated use of *shuv* creates an important literary theme in Ruth: **departure and return, loss and restoration**. Naomi's physical return to Bethlehem becomes the beginning of a much greater restoration in her life.

3. Ruth 1:8 — (*Hesed*) — “Faithful Love”

(*Hesed*) is one of the most important theological words in the Book of Ruth.: In **Ruth 1:8**, Naomi says to Ruth and Orpah: “May the LORD show *hesed* to you.” The term occurs again significantly in **Ruth 2:20**. *Hesed* cannot be adequately translated simply as “kindness” or “mercy.”

Parallel References : Genesis 24:27 — God's *hesed* toward Abraham's household; Exodus 34:6 — God abounding in *hesed*; Psalm 136 — “His *hesed* endures forever”; Micah 6:8 — “to love *hesed*”

In Ruth, God's *hesed* is frequently manifested **through human actions**—especially through Ruth's faithfulness toward Naomi and Boaz's kindness toward Ruth. Thus, the divine *hesed* is not presented merely as an abstract divine attribute; it becomes visible through concrete acts of **loyalty, compassion, protection, and responsibility**.

4. Ruth 1:20–21 —(*Shadday*) — “Almighty”

In **Ruth 1:20–21**, Naomi says: “The Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me.”

The Hebrew expression is: — *’El Shadday*: Traditionally, **Shadday** is translated as “**Almighty**”, giving the expression “**God Almighty**” or “**Almighty God**.” The precise etymology of *Shadday* is debated in Hebrew scholarship, but its traditional biblical usage presents it as an important designation for God, particularly in the ancestral narratives of Genesis.

Parallel References: Genesis 17:1 — *’El Šadday*; Genesis 28:3; Genesis 35:11; Genesis 43:14; Genesis 48:3

5. Ruth 1:20 — (*Mara*) — “Bitter”

Parallel References : Exodus 15:23 — מָרָה (*Mārāh*), “Marah,” the place of bitter water; Exodus 15:25 — the bitter water of Marah; Isaiah 38:17 — the experience of bitterness

Exegetical Significance : Naomi interprets her life as “**Mara**,” bitter. However, the narrator does not allow that interpretation to become the final meaning of her story. By Ruth 4, Naomi's life is restored through Ruth, Boaz, and the birth of Obed. Thus, the movement is: **Naomi → Mara → Restoration**

6. Ruth 2:20 — (Goel) — “Kinsman-Redeemer”

Goel is one of the most important theological and legal concepts in the Book of Ruth. In **Ruth 4**, Boaz assumes the role of the redeemer.

Parallel Reference: Isaiah 41:14 — the LORD is called “your Redeemer”

7. Ruth 2:1 — (*Mishpahah*) — “Family / Clan”

In **Ruth 2:1**, Boaz is described as belonging to the family or clan of Elimelech. This term can refer to an **extended family, clan, or larger kinship group**.

Parallel References: Genesis 12:3 — **families/clans**; Numbers 1:18 — **family/clan structure**; 1 Samuel 10:21 — **family/clan divisions**;

8. Ruth 3:11 — (*Eshet Hayil*) — “A Woman of Worth / Capable Woman”

In **Ruth 3:11**, Boaz says: “All my fellow townsmen know that you are a woman of worth.”

9. Ruth 2:2–3 — (*Leqet*) — “Gleaning” : (*Leqet*) refers to the practice of **gleaning**, that is, gathering grain left behind after harvesting. In **Ruth 2:2–3**, Ruth goes into the field and gathers what remains behind the harvesters.

Parallel References: Leviticus 19:9–10; Leviticus 23:22; Deuteronomy 24:19–22;

These laws provided social protection for the poor, foreigners, widows, the vulnerable. Ruth's gleaning is not merely an accidental means of obtaining food. It reflects the practical application of Israel's covenant law, which required the community to care for vulnerable people. Thus, Ruth's experience in Boaz's field illustrates how divine providence can operate through the ethical obligations of God's covenant community.

10. Ruth 2:12 — (*Kanaph*) — “Wing / Edge of a Garment”

In **Ruth 2:12**, Boaz says that Ruth has come to seek refuge: “under whose wings you have come to take refuge.”

Parallel References: Exodus 19:4 — “on eagles’ wings”, Psalm 17:8 — “in the shadow of your wings”; Psalm 36:7; Psalm 57:1; Psalm 91:4;

Special Significance

In **Ruth 2:12**, Boaz says: “You have come to take refuge under the wings of the LORD.” But in **Ruth 3:9**, Ruth says to Boaz: “Spread your wings over your servant.” This creates a remarkable literary connection:

Ruth 2:12 → the wings of God : Ruth 3:9 → the wings of Boaz

In other words, **God's protective care becomes tangible through Boaz's actions**. Boaz becomes, in a narrative sense, an instrument through whom God's protection and provision are manifested.

11. Ruth 3:9 — (*Parash Kanaph*) — “Spread the Wing”

In **Ruth 3:9**, Ruth says: “Spread your wings over your servant.”

In **Ruth 2:12**: **Ruth seeks refuge under the wings of the LORD**. In **Ruth 3:9**: **Ruth asks Boaz to spread his wing over her**. Therefore, there is a strong **literary and theological link between Ruth 2:12 and Ruth 3:9**. The imagery suggests that Boaz is called to become the **human agent of the divine protection** that Ruth had sought from the LORD. This is one of the most beautiful theological motifs in the Book of Ruth: **God's providence is often experienced through the faithful actions of human beings**.