



NAVIGATING RUTH

WHO?

The four key figures of the book are: Naomi, Ruth, Boaz and Yahweh, the God of Israel. Though Yahweh does not directly appear or speak in the story, he is described throughout as the sovereign Lord, the God who is in control of all the events in the book. <See WHAT?>

The story itself begins with Elimelech and his wife Naomi, along with their two sons, Mahlon and Chilion, disobediently fleeing to Moab to escape a great famine in their home country of Judah (1:1-2). <See WHERE?> There in Moab the two sons marry Moabite women, Orpah and Ruth.

With the untimely death of her husband and two sons, Naomi bitterly returns home. She is accompanied by her daughter-in-law Ruth, who loyally chooses to forsake her country, people and gods to join Naomi in Judah. In God’s providence, the poor outsider Ruth finds a gracious ally and eventually a husband in Boaz, a wealthy and compassionate man, who takes both widows into his care. Hope for an heir is realised in Boaz and Ruth’s son Obed, who becomes the grandfather of king David (4:17-22) and whose line ultimately leads to the King of Kings, Jesus (Matthew 1:5-6,16).

WHAT?

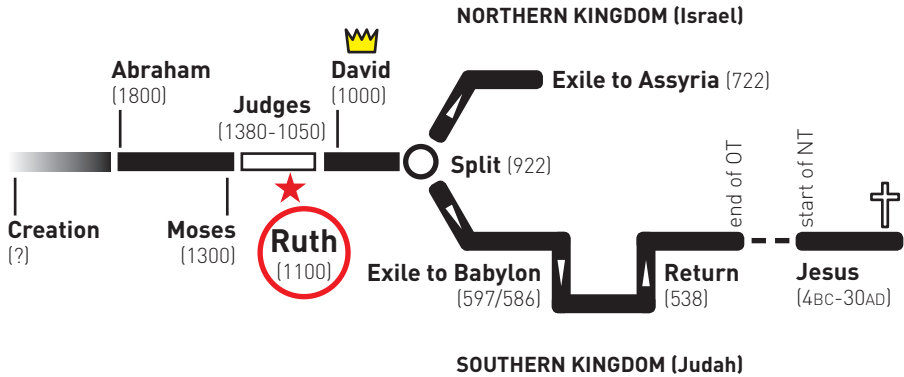
The book of Ruth operates on two interrelated levels. On the surface level, the book is an unlikely love story between the rich and powerful Boaz and the poor outsider Ruth. Yet Boaz’s gracious care of Ruth and Naomi points us to the bigger picture: Yahweh’s loving kindness towards his people. As Ruth finds refuge and redemption under the “wings” of Boaz, we come to understand something of the refuge and redemption God’s people can find in his kindness (eg. compare 2:12 with 3:9). The Creator of the universe has an extraordinary concern for ordinary people. We see this illustrated in the character of Naomi as well. Naomi begins the story in a state of “emptiness” as a childless widow (1:6-22). Yet she is given new hope in the relationship of Ruth and Boaz (2:1-22), which progresses towards fulfilment (3:1-18) and finally “fullness” with the birth of an heir (4:1-22).

Refuge		Redemption	
1:1-5	Running away	3:1-18	Finding a redeemer
1:6-22	Returning home	4:1-12	Securing redemption
2:1-23	Finding refuge	4:13-22	Leaving a legacy

Again this seemingly simple story parallels the incredible hope God’s people have through his promised king (4:17-22; 2 Samuel 7), finding its fulfilment ultimately in Jesus Christ (Matthew 1:5-6,16). In the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, God gives his ordinary people extraordinary refuge and redemption.

WHEN?

The book of Ruth is set at least 1100 years before Jesus, “in the days when the judges ruled” (1:1; see the book of Judges), a dark and bloody period after the land of Canaan was settled and before the Kings of Israel ruled. The judges of Israel ruled roughly between 1380 BC and 1050 BC.



WHERE?

The story begins in famine-plagued Bethlehem (which ironically means “the house of bread”), located in the tribal land of Judah, west of the Dead Sea (1:1-2). However, the scene quickly changes as the family unwisely flees to the country of Moab, to the Sea’s east (1:2). Note that Moab was the home of one of Israel’s ancient enemies, the Moabites (see Judges 3:12-30). After the death of her husband and two sons, Naomi returns with Ruth to her home town of Bethlehem in Judah (1:6-19), where the rest of the story takes place. Bethlehem would later become the birthplace of both King David and Jesus.

