

THE STORY OF RUTH



Ruth is the story of how a woman's life falls apart through family displacement, and the death of her husband and sons, and then how it is put back together through the extraordinary love of her foreign daughter-in-law and of a distant relative back home. The woman's name is not Ruth but Naomi.

Reading or listening to the book of Ruth would be really helpful to you, enabling you to get so much more from the series.

- » This is a link to a YouTube clip in which the book of [Ruth is read by David Suchet](#). (It takes 15 minutes and 17 seconds).
- » Here's a link to the [Faith Comes By Hearing](#) website. You can download a free app that will give you the whole bible. With this app you can listen to or read the book of Ruth.
- » Here is a link to a great [introduction to the book of Ruth](#).

The book could be read simply as a romantic love story, that, however, is to miss out on so much. These notes are here to help you go deeper and to enable you to get so much more out of the book than the preachers will have time for.

Contents

WHAT WAS IT LIKE TO LIVE IN THE DAYS OF RUTH?..... 3

WHAT’S ALL THIS ABOUT LAND OWNERSHIP?..... 4

How is it then that Elimelech’s land could be sold to Boaz? 4

... AND WHY DID MARRYING RUTH FORM PART OF THE DEAL IN CHAPTER 4?..... 5

WHAT WAS LIFE LIKE FOR WIDOWS AT THIS TIME? 6

WHAT’S IN A NAME?7

WHAT WAS ISRAEL’S HISTORY WITH MOAB?..... 8

STEADFAST LOVE 9

IT JUST SO HAPPENED THAT.....10

What was it like to live in the days of Ruth?

The book starts with the words, "In the days when the judges ruled there was famine in the land".

The book of Judges comes after the book of Joshua. The Israelites had taken possession of most of the promised land. Speaking through Joshua in Joshua 23 God reminds the people what he has done for them and what he expects in return and what the consequences would be if they were to turn to other gods. "Do not associate with these nations that remain among you; do not invoke the names of their gods or swear by them. You must not serve them or bow down to them. But you are to hold fast to the Lord your God, as you have until now."

- » Here's a link to the chapter: [Joshua 23 NIV - Joshua's Farewell to the Leaders - Bible Gateway](#)
- » See also: [Deuteronomy 28 NIV - Blessings for Obedience - If you fully - Bible Gateway](#)

After the death of Joshua the Israelites repeatedly turned away to other gods and the consequences were always defeat, crop failure, loss of territory and freedom. When the people turned back to God he always used someone to defeat the enemies and bring back at least a measure of prosperity.

There were lots of judges, Gideon and Samson being the most well-known.

The final words of the book of Judges in chapter 21 verse 25 are "In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as they saw fit." Or everyone did what was right in their own eyes.

To get an idea of what life was like read the final four chapters of Judges.

[HOME](#)

[NEXT](#)

What's all this about land ownership?

Israel was not a capitalist society.

Israel and its surrounding societies were all agricultural (agrarian) societies. Everyone relied on food being produced by farming.

Joshua divided up the promised land among the tribes in Joshua chapters 13 to 18: [Joshua 13 NIV - Land Still to Be Taken - When Joshua - Bible Gateway](#)

Each tribe received their own area and the families within those tribes received an allocation which was theirs to pass on to subsequent generations through the male line. (The daughters of Zelophe had fought their corner rather well though in chapter 17!)

» There's a map here: [WORLD TIME LINE CHANNEL: Division of the Promised Land Large Map \(ancientscripture.blogspot.com\)](#)

This system was designed to ensure that everyone had some means of support and a place to call home.

How is it then that Elimelech's land could be sold to Boaz?

No system is perfect! Ownership of land passed through the male line so something had to be put in place for cases where there was no male to inherit. The system is known as "levirate marriage". The word levirate has got nothing to do with Levites, but is from the Latin "*levir*" which means brother-in-law.

If a man dies without producing a male heir it was the responsibility of the man's brother to marry the widow and produce a son for his brother. That son would then go on to inherit the land as if he were the dead brother's son.

That's what the Sadducees were testing Jesus on in Matthew 22!

Elimelech left Bethlehem but the land was still his inheritance.

» More on this here: [What is a levirate marriage? | GotQuestions.org](#)

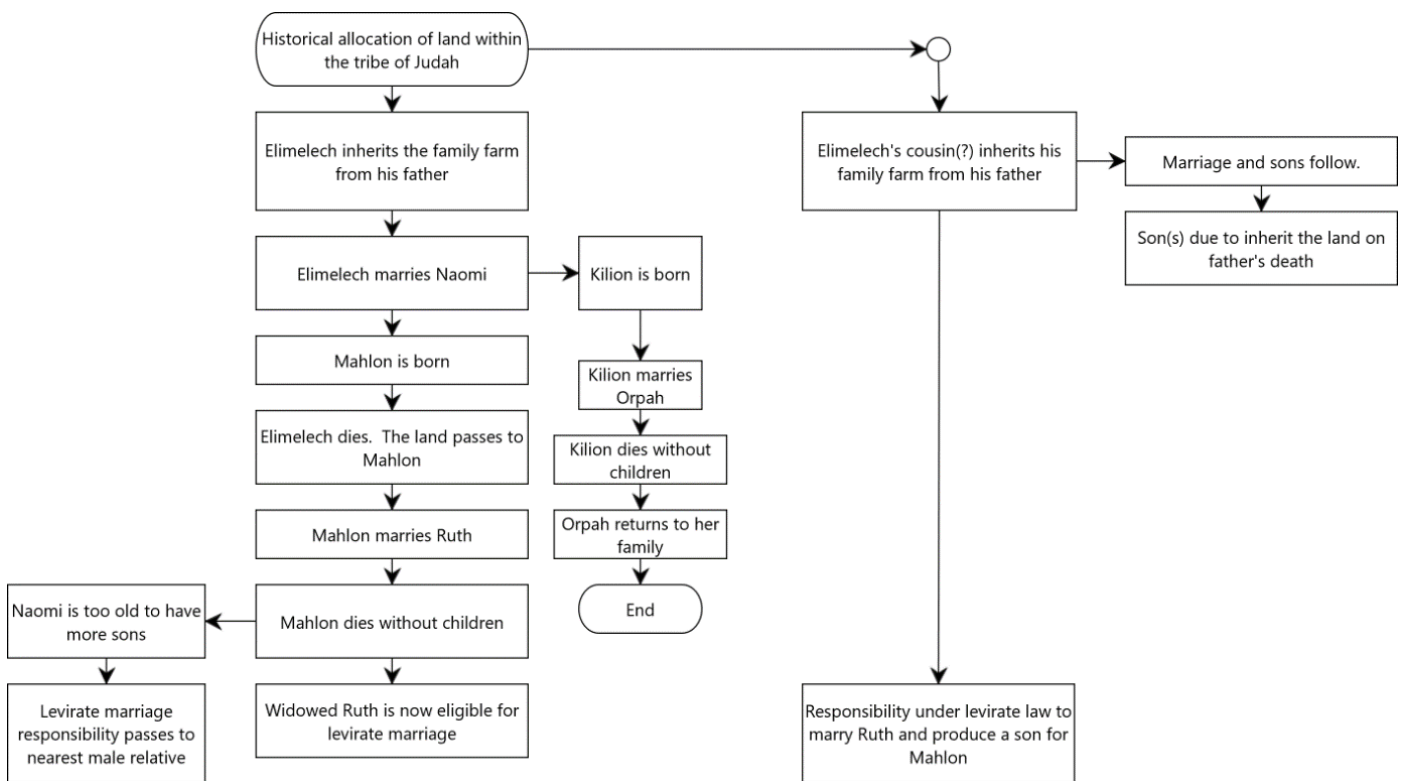
[HOME](#)

[NEXT](#)

... and why did marrying Ruth form part of the deal in chapter 4?

Elimelech had two sons, Mahlon and Kilion, neither of whom had sons of their own. It was the responsibility of the nearest male relative – the kinsman redeemer – to produce an heir for him. As Mahlon’s widow Ruth’s destiny was tied into the land owned by her father-in-law.

The unnamed kinsman-redeemer was unwilling to perform his levirate marriage duty. This was because he did not want any of his own estate to be in danger of becoming part of Elimelech’s inheritance.



[HOME](#)

[NEXT](#)

What was life like for widows at this time?

The bible has a very high regard for women and their place and role in society. [This article from Jews for Jesus is very informative.](#)

When widows are mentioned in the bible they are portrayed as people without means of supporting themselves unless they are supported by children or return to their fathers. Widows without a father's family and with no sons to support them are therefore in a precarious position.

[Deuteronomy 25](#) makes provision for widows during the harvest as landowners are instructed not to go back and harvest corn stalks that have been missed in the first pass so that they are available for the poor in society to glean. Widows, such as Ruth and Naomi, are included in this group.

The law of [levirate marriage](#) is also another route into family security.

These passages from Deuteronomy give us an idea of the value that God placed on the widows and others who had no real status in society:

- » He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the foreigner residing among you, giving them food and clothing. **Deuteronomy 10:18**
- » *so that the Levites (who have no land allotted to them or any inheritance of their own) and the foreigners, the fatherless and the widows who live in your towns may come and eat and be satisfied, and so that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands.* **Deuteronomy 14:29**
- » And rejoice before the Lord your God at the place he will choose as a dwelling for his Name – you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, the Levites in your towns, and the foreigners, the fatherless and the widows living among you. **Deuteronomy 16:11**
- » *Be joyful at your festival – you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, and the Levites, the foreigners, the fatherless and the widows who live in your towns.* **Deuteronomy 16:14**
- » Do not deprive the foreigner or the fatherless of justice or take the cloak of the widow as a pledge. **Deuteronomy 24:17**
- » *When you are harvesting in your field and you overlook a sheaf, do not go back to get it. Leave it for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow, so that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands.* **Deuteronomy 24:19**
- » When you beat the olives from your trees, do not go over the branches a second time. Leave what remains for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow. **Deuteronomy 24:20**
- » *When you have finished setting aside a tenth of all your produce in the third year, the year of the tithe, you shall give it to the Levite, the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow, so that they may eat in your towns and be satisfied.* **Deuteronomy 26:12**
- » Then say to the Lord your God: 'I have removed from my house the sacred portion and have given it to the Levite, the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow, according to all you commanded. I have not turned aside from your commands, nor have I forgotten any of them. **Deuteronomy 26:13**

[HOME](#)

[NEXT](#)

What's in a Name?

Names, their meanings, their use and non-use is a fascinating study in the book of Ruth. Here's a taster.

Name	Meaning
Bethlehem	The House of Bread
Elimelech	My God is King
Naomi	Pleasant
Mara	Bitter

At the start of the book the one whose name means "My God is King" takes his family from "The House of Bread" to Moab to find food. We have seen that God promised food and security to the people of Israel if they wholeheartedly devoted themselves to Him. Instead of trusting God to do this Elimelech takes his family to a society which worships other gods.

Naomi, "Pleasant" returns home a childless widow and proclaims her name now to be Mara "Bitter" because "the Lord has brought me back empty". She does not yet recognise the tremendous gift that God has given her in Ruth.

On first arriving back in Bethlehem Ruth is referred to as "The Moabite" or "Ruth the Moabite". She is a foreigner from a country that has been Israel's enemy ([see Judges 3: 12 to 28 for example](#)) and [here for some more detail](#).

Notice how Boaz, the powerful landowner, refers to Ruth as "[daughter](#)" right from the start. Rejecting the prejudice against her.

Boaz, having received a marriage proposal from Ruth, wants to marry her but there is an obstacle. There is a closer kinsman-redeemer. This kinsman-redeemer refuses to carry out the duty expected of him by the [levirate law](#). His name is not known. Is this because his name is not worthy to be known?

When Boaz is proposing to this nameless man that he redeem the land he adds in that "[Ruth the Moabite](#) is part of the bargain. Is he emphasising Ruth's foreign, enemy origins to make her less attractive to this man?

Finally, in [chapter 4 verse 16](#) Naomi receives Ruth's baby into her arms. She is no longer Mara, but Naomi again.

[HOME](#)

[NEXT](#)

What was Israel's history with Moab?

[Genesis 19: 30 to 38](#) tells us that Lot and his two daughters lived in a cave. The daughters got their father drunk, slept with him and both gave birth to a son. One of those sons was called Moab. Moab means, "of my father". His name and the nation he founded are always reminded of his incestuous beginnings whenever the name Moab is used.

Following the exodus from slavery in Egypt the Israelites wandered in the wilderness for forty years. As the forty years were coming to an end they began to move towards the promised land, approaching Moab as they did so. [Numbers 22](#) tells the story of the panic in Moab at their approach and how the king, Balak, summoned the prophet Balaam to come and put a curse on the Israelites. The subsequent chapters tell how wrong that went with Balaam prophesying against Moab in [Numbers 24](#) verse 17.

[Numbers 25](#) however describes how the Moabite women turned the Israelite men away from Yahweh to their own god, [The Baal of Peor](#), through sexual immorality. This resulted in God sending plague and the death of thousands of Israelites.

As a result of these incidents God decreed in [Deuteronomy 23](#) that no ... *Moabite or any of their descendants may enter the assembly of the Lord, not even in the tenth generation.* ⁴ *For they did not come to meet you with bread and water on your way when you came out of Egypt, and they hired Balaam son of Beor from Pethor in Aram Naharaim^q to pronounce a curse on you.* ⁵ *However, the Lord your God would not listen to Balaam but turned the curse into a blessing for you, because the Lord your God loves you.* ⁶ *Do not seek a treaty of friendship with them as long as you live.*

In the time of the Judges ([Judges 3](#)) Eglon the fat king of the Moabites attacked and defeated Israel and treated them harshly, oppressing them and taking their crops. When the Israelites turned back to God and cried out to him, he send Ehud to free them and to rule over them.

Throughout their history God has used the Moabites to oppress the Israelites when they have turned away from him.

Later in history, after the Jews had returned from exile in Babylon, Israelite men again began to marry and to have sexual relations with Moabite women, once again deserting Yahweh for the Moabite Gods. See [Ezra 9](#), and [Nehemiah 13](#).

[HOME](#)

[NEXT](#)

Steadfast Love

The Hebrew word *hesed* is a key word in the book of Ruth. It means commitment, steadfast love or loving kindness. It is the old testament's equivalent to the New Testament's Greek word *agape*, the quality of self-giving, all-encompassing love that God has for us his people.

Ruth shows that kind of love to Naomi in chapter one.

Boaz shows that quality of love in his commitment to his community. He obeys the law of God by allowing people to glean in his fields and by ensuring that God's concern for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow is followed in a practical way in his fields. This particularly true of the way he treats Ruth. Compare the way Boaz talks to Ruth and the attitude of the overseer in chapter 2.

We know very little about Boaz. It seems that he is an older man, he must be rich to own fields that others work in and we do not know if he already has a wife or any sons of his own.

What we do know from the attitude and actions of the other, unnamed kinsman-redeemer is that by marrying Ruth he puts his own property at risk of being inherited by the descendants of Elimelech. Such is his attitude of *hesed* that he puts all he has on the line to redeem Naomi and Ruth and thus Elimelech's line.

[HOME](#)

[NEXT](#)

It just so happened that...

- » Ruth and Naomi returned to Bethlehem as the barley harvest was beginning.
- » Ruth went out to glean and found herself in a field belong to a member of Elimelech's clan.
- » Boaz arrives at the field on the day that Ruth begins to glean.

HOME