

Bible Study



WHEN?

There are two possible dates for when the book may have been written. The book's events occur around 1100 BC. It references King David and may have been written at that time. Other scholars believe it to have been written after the return from Babylonian exile around 500 BC.

LINEAGE

In the final chapter there is a genealogy that traces King David, Israel's greatest king, back to Ruth the Moabite. This shows that Israel's mission was never meant to exclude outsiders.

THE BOOK OF RUTH

WHY?

Deuteronomy 23:3 forbids anyone from Moab being welcomed in the assembly of the Lord for 10 generations. The story of Ruth has a message that opposes this exclusive view. If it was written later it would carry a similar message to post exilic Jews who were telling the people to put away their foreign wives and children. (Nehemiah 13, Ezra 10:3). Ruth is a Moabite loyal to an Israelite and her story is about embodying the highest values of a community despite her status as an unwelcome foreigner.

THE THEME

The overarching theme of the book is faithfulness and loving kindness. King David, and Jesus himself, come from a line of faithful people. Staying faithful in the everyday, ordinary things of life, even in times of uncertainty, can result in blessings and can even change outsiders into insiders. (Ruth 1:16)

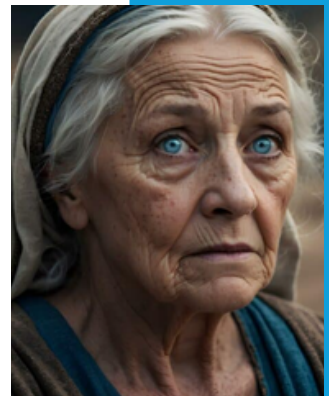
ELIMELECH

Mentioned briefly in the first few verses, Elimelech leaves his home in search of food during a widespread famine. This was not uncommon at the time (See Gen 12:10, 26:1). It is likely he descended from an aristocratic family from Bethlehem (also known as Ephrath). He was from the tribe of Judah and owned land and property in Israel. Elimelech means “God is King”.



NAOMI

An Israelite and the wife of Elimelech. Mother of their two sons - Mahlon and Kilion. After a short time in Moab Elimelech died and after ten years both her sons, now married, also died. This left Naomi and her daughters-in-law without male protection. Naomi would have likely been in her mid to late 40s and facing great difficulty. Her decision to return home was a sensible one. At the very least they could glean from the fields.



RUTH

Ruth was a Moabite and wife of Naomi's son Mahlon. Upon hearing of Naomi's desire to return to Israel, Ruth decided to remain with her. The better option for Ruth was to return to the protection of her father. In Judaism during Shavuot, Ruth is remembered for her acceptance of faith as an analogy of the Israelites acceptance of the Torah. Ruth chose to bind herself to God's people and His Law, which transformed her life.



BOAZ

An Israelite, man of good standing and a distant relative of Elimelech. He shows kindness and protection to Naomi and Ruth in a time when women often had to sell themselves into slavery or prostitution and were also at risk of being attacked. Eventually he takes on the role of “kinsman redeemer” buying back Elimelech's land, marrying Ruth and providing an heir for Elimelech and Naomi (Deuteronomy 25:5-6).

