

Major Events

- An Israelite family from Bethlehem—Elimelek, his wife Naomi, and their sons Mahlon and Chilion—emigrate to the nearby country of Moab during a famine in the time of the Judges
- Elimelech dies and then the two sons die, leaving their Moabite wives: Ruth and Orpah.
- Naomi decides to return to Bethlehem. She tells her daughters-in-law to return to their own mothers and remarry. Orpah reluctantly leaves.
- Ruth says, "Entreat me not to leave you or to turn back from following you; for wherever you go, I will go; and wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God, my God." (Ruth 1:16 NRSV).
- Ruth and Naomi return to Bethlehem during the barley harvest. To support her mother-in-law and herself, Ruth goes to fields belonging to Boaz to glean (gather grain left by the reapers).
- Boaz, as relative of Naomi's husband's family, must under Levirate law marry Ruth.
- Naomi sends Ruth to the threshing floor at night and tells her to "uncover the feet" of the sleeping Boaz. Ruth does so and asks Boaz to spread his cloak over her (marry her).
- Another male relative relinquishes his right to marry Ruth and gives his sandal to Boaz as evidence of the agreement.
- Boaz and Ruth get married and have a son named Obed.
- Obed is the descendant of Perez, son of Judah, and grandfather of David.

Major Themes

- Inclusivity
- Loving-kindness (Heb. *chesed*)
- God's providential care
- Integrity

Dates and Authorship

- Traditionally ascribed to the prophet Samuel, *The Book of Ruth* is now regarded as a novella written sometime during the Hellenistic Era (336 -31 BC).

Details to be aware of

- Among the poorest and most rejected members of Old Testament societies were widows and foreigners.
- God stands by the needy and oppressed – materially, emotionally, and spiritually. Through his servants, he extends his love and mercy.
- Acts of loving-kindness go beyond measure and demonstrate that a person can go beyond the minimum expectations of the law. The law is important, however, and the story reflects a need to stay within legal boundaries.
- When there is no heir to inherit the land, levirate custom required a close relative (usually a brother-in-law) to marry the widow of the deceased in order to continue his family line.
- The son born to Naomi is more than just a gift from God to continue her lineage. Genealogy shows this son is the father of Jesse, the father of David, with the line continuing through Jesus.