



Ruth – an example of *Narrative*:

The book of Ruth shows us the power of God’s redemptive love through the story of two poor Moabite widows. It is a story of divine provision, not through miracles, but through the faithful obedience of his people.

The author of Ruth skillfully weaves together provision, mercy, redemption, and loyal love at all levels of life and society. It is a demonstration of the Kingdom at its finest: care for the poor, redemption of the lost and broken, and the adoption of a foreigner into a new physical and spiritual home.

Structure/Genre:

- The book of Ruth is a narrative love story, although the love portrayed is not romantic, but of faith and family.
- There are no miracles, no villains, and each character faces their own crisis. How each person handles the crisis reveals a great deal about his or her character.
- Much of the story is told through dialogue, and every prayer or blessing is said for someone else.

Authorship and Setting:

Jewish tradition names Samuel as the author of Ruth. While scholars disagree, it is possible Samuel or a contemporary wrote the original version with edits and shaping occurring over time.

The events of Ruth take place “in the days when the judges ruled,” an era spanning 1380-1050 B.C. Much of the story occurs either in Moab, a region south and east of Israel, or in Bethlehem at a time when the Jebusites still controlled neighboring Jerusalem. It is also a time when women were unable to inherit from their husbands. Property went to the closest male relative willing to marry the widow and bring her into his household.

The Book of Ruth is part of the *Five Megillot*, a group of scrolls read during the Jewish holidays. Ruth is read during the Feast of Weeks, also called Pentecost.

Characters:

Ruth: A Moabite woman married to Naomi's son, Mahlon.

Naomi: A Jewish woman moved from her home in Bethlehem to Moab by her husband, Elimelech.

Orpah: A Moabite woman married to Naomi's son, Chilion.

Boaz: A wealthy landowner in Bethlehem. A relative of Naomi through her husband, Elimelech.

Elimelech: A man from Bethlehem in the tribe of Judah who moves his wife and two sons to Moab during a famine. He was wealthy enough to travel and own property in Bethlehem.

Themes:

Ruth centers around two Hebrew words: *Khesed* and *Go'el*.

Khesed is often translated loyal love, but also means generosity, enduring commitment, and promise keeping. It implies deep care and loyalty towards the other person. This word is often used in reference to God and is one word he used to describe himself (see Exodus 34:6).

Go'el is the word for kinsman-redeemer, a cultural expectation in ancient Israel. Women were unable to inherit and required a male relative to marry her and bring her into his household along with her husband's property. But this idea also came with a sense of family responsibility to seek justice, provide protection, and pursue restitution for those who could not care for themselves. It also implied the need to continue the family line, ensuring future stability for the women.

Reading Plan: Week 1

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
Ruth 1	Ruth 2	Ruth 3	Ruth 4	Matthew 1:1-16

Questions to ask as you read:

- What do I observe in the passage? What is happening and/or what are the characters saying?
- Where do I see God?
- What questions does this raise for me?

Questions to discuss with a group:

- What did you learn about God?
- What do you think of Ruth and Naomi? What do their actions tell you about their character and faith?
- Where do you see God's provision? How does this change how you see his provision in your own life?

Reading Plan: Week 2

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
Genesis 35:19, Judges 2:6-23, Ruth 1	Lev 23:22, Deut 24:19-22, Ruth 2	Lev 25:23-25, Ezekiel 16:8, Ruth 3	Deut 25:5-10, Josh 6:22-25, 1 Chron 2:9-11, Ruth 4	Matthew 6:19- 7:27

Questions to ask as you read:

- In what ways do you identify with Ruth and Naomi? In what ways do they challenge you?
- How do you see God differently the second time through?
- How does the story of Ruth help you love your neighbors well?

Questions to discuss with a group:

- How did you read it differently the second time? How did the additional scriptures alter your reading?
- Where do you see God in the story of Ruth? Where do you struggle to see him in your own life?
- How does the story of Ruth affect your view of God's provision?
- How might this change how you invite those different from you into your community? How is God's view different from our own?

To Learn More:

- Bible Project:
 - <https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/ruth/>
 - <https://bibleproject.com/blog/ruth-big-message-short-story/>
 - <https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/loyal-love/>
- Carolyn Custis-James, *Finding God in the Margins: The Book of Ruth* (Lexham Press, 2018)