

Two Year Bible Trek  
Week 20  
Ruth

**Key Concepts:** The key concept in Ruth is the attitude of welcome and compassion God's people ought to have to strangers and outsiders.

**Stories:** This book is a single story which includes Ruth's risky decision (1), Ruth's work which leads to her encounter with Boaz (2), Ruth's and Boaz's engagement (3-4:12) and a list of Ruth and Boaz's descendants (4:13-18)

**Brief Summary:** The book of Ruth has long been a subject of debate within the academic community. The issues have centered on its date of authorship and its purpose. The date of authorship was long believed to be around 400 BCE after the Jews returned from exile in Babylon. This date was based on Aramaic influences on the Hebrew used in the story which could only have been possible at a late date. In addition its contents were seen as a story intended to counter the post-return commands to exclude all foreigners from the Jewish community (thus its purpose). More recently there have been arguments that it ought to be dated much earlier (900-750 BCE) and the interactions between Ruth (a foreigner from Moab) and Boaz (an Israelite) are intended to clarify how Israelites should deal with Canaanites. I offer this discussion as a way of saying this book could be placed in at least two different sections of our Two Year Bible Trek. I have chosen to place it here because it makes a nice bridge into the books that follow.

In terms of themes there are a few we should examine. The first is that of an ideal community that adheres to the Law. As we have noted in earlier readings, the Law consists of rules designed to create an ordered society in which people can love God and neighbor. In Ruth we witness people actually doing what they are supposed to according to the Law. Everyone appears to know their place as well as the boundaries of their social/religious obligations and then they stick to them. This adherence gives the story a very calm and peaceful feel.

The second theme is that of caring for the stranger. In both historical periods mentioned in the opening discussion, the Israelite community was struggling with two contradictory commands. The first was that they were to be holy (meaning separated from non-Israelites). The second was that they were to welcome strangers and treat them with respect. The command to be holy/separate even caused Israelite men returning from exile to divorce their non-Israelite wives. Ruth emphasizes the command to care for strangers. Not only will we witness Ruth caring for Naomi and Boaz caring for Ruth, we will discover that Ruth is an ancestor of King David; thus even King David is not a "pure" Israelite.

The third theme is that of God being somewhat absent from the story. In the books we have read up to this point there are significant conversations between God and human beings. This story contains none of those interactions. God never speaks. Instead God is the focus of prayer, is thanked and is referred to. In other words this story is much more like real life where few of us are given direct communication from God. The people know how they are to live (in accordance with the Torah) and they do their best to do so. There is no need for God to directly address the characters

Finally please take note of the male/female interactions. You will see in them an example of the Levirate rules for a childless widow from Deut. 25:5-6 and land redemption from Leviticus 25:25.

1. What lessons do you take for your own life from the way Ruth cares for Naomi?
2. What lessons do you take for your own life from the way Boaz treats Ruth?
3. How do you react to the male-female relationships in this story?