

The book of Ruth is written in a family style narrative. It is a story that would have been passed down from generation to generation, thus keeping the family history alive. As an idyll, the narrative describes the simple rustic life of ordinary people.

### **Ruth**

The book of Ruth is a beautiful book of the life of a young Moabite woman faced with hardship, and her humble character in facing those times. Keeping in mind that Ruth is the great grandmother of King David the purpose of this book may also be to explain how a Moabite woman came to be in the blood line of David and eventually the savior of the world, Jesus.

The first chapter opens up with explaining the situation. We are told it was the days of the judges. If we remember back to the book directly before Ruth in our canon we know the book of Judges ends stating the situation “in those days.” The writer of Judges tells us, ending the book of Judges, that in those days there was no king in Israel and everyone did what they saw fit in their own eyes. This is important as it shares a background to this story of Ruth.

The setting then is this, in the dark days of spiritual struggle in Judges there was a famine according to the writer of Ruth. It’s not known if this famine was for punishment, but we know there is a famine nonetheless. We are introduced to Elimelech and his wife Naomi. Elimelech takes his family, including his two sons, and leaves from the famine land of Bethlehem to Moab. There his two sons take wives from the Moabite women. One of these wives is Ruth. As the story progresses we are told that Elimelech dies and then both his sons die leaving the women left alive.

For Naomi you couldn’t imagine a harder time to face. She lost her husband and both her sons. As she will tell the women of Bethlehem on her return she was left empty. Knowing she could not provide her daughters-in-law with their needs, a home, husband and families, she urged them to return to the houses of their mothers. After pleading one daughter goes, yet Ruth stays.

It is at this moment of being urged to leave Naomi we really meet Ruth. Ruth, knowing that Naomi had nothing to offer—that is, she had no riches, no more sons—decided she would stay with Naomi. She tells Naomi, where “you go I will go.” We need to understand she was willing to leave for a far off place not familiar to her. She would be returning with Naomi to land that may be hostile to her for her Moabite background.

If simply desiring to stay with Naomi wasn’t noble enough in many an eye, she states that, “your god will be my God.” Here Ruth makes the greatest choice we’ll see in this book. Ruth chooses Jehovah to be her God. Her loyalty is further exalted as she tells Naomi to let God deal with her if anything less than death separates them. At such obvious loyalty Naomi could no longer argue and accepts that her daughter-in-law will return Bethlehem with her.

Upon Naomi's return, the women of the town meet her thanking God for her return. Yet Naomi was hurting deeply and says not to call her Naomi, but rather Mara for she had returned empty. God had dealt with her, she said, and judged her.

Some debate could be raised here for whether these things came about because of sin or these things came about for other reasons. It's not sure how important that debate is. Naomi was obviously hurting; she understood the circumstance far better than we do today, so let her words stand as her words and let the truth of the greater story inspire us. What we see, then, is a young woman who displays loyalty and love towards her mother-in-law. Ruth is willing to go to a land that is not of her own people, and willing to care for Naomi. She makes this commitment without looking for anything in return; not seeking some material item or possession. The love, loyalty and the faith of this woman already apparent in just a few verses show us an example of caring and devotion.

### **Who are the Moabites?**

When Ruth and her husband had to leave Bethlehem because of famine, they took refuge in Moab. According to Genesis, the Moabites were relatives of the Israelites, both peoples tracing their descent back to a common ancestor, Terah. The Moabites had kinship ties to Jacob's first-born son, Reuben. Unfortunately, this also meant that Reuben's descendents were killed when David waged war on the Moabites.

The conflict between the Israelites and the Moabites is expressed in the biblical narrative describing the Moabites' incestuous origins. According to the story, Moab was the son of Lot, through his eldest daughter, with whom he had a child after the destruction of Sodom. The Bible then explains the etymology of Moab as meaning "of his father". Nevertheless, there was considerable interchange between the two peoples, and the Bible in the Book of Ruth traces King David's lineage to a Moabite woman.

The story of Ruth testifies to the existence of a friendly intercourse between Moab and Bethlehem, a town of the tribe of Judah. By his descent from Ruth, David may be said to have had Moabite blood in his veins. He committed his parents to the protection of the king of Moab (who may have been his kinsman), when hard pressed by King Saul. But here all friendly relations stop forever. The next time the name is mentioned is in the account of David's war, who made the Moabites tributary.

Sometime during the Persian period, Moab disappears from the extant historical record; its territory subsequently overrun by waves of tribes from Arabia. Their country, however, continued to be known by its biblical name for some time. When the Crusaders occupied the area, the castle built to defend the eastern part of the Kingdom of Jerusalem was called Krak des Moabites.