



R U T H

— STUDY GUIDE —

THE BOOK OF RUTH

Study Guide

A Timeless Testament

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THE BOOK OF RUTH

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HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

This guide offers a four-week plan to study the Book of Ruth, dedicating one chapter to each week. Every week highlights a central theme and encourages you to interact with the Biblical text through reading, personal reflection, and prayer.

- Week 1 - Framing Perspectives, Literary Overview & Tragedy
- Week 2 - Providence
- Week 3 - Risk
- Week 4 - Redemption & Final Reflections

Complete the study independently without relying on external resources or commentaries. The goal is to build your confidence engaging in Scripture and grow your biblical knowledge through personal exploration.

Progress through the material at your own pace throughout the week. When we gather, we will cover that week's chapter with extra teaching, group discussions, and Q&A. Questions marked by a blue vertical line will guide our discussions, so please be ready to share your thoughts.

Each chapter contains a section titled "Tracing the Theme" that assists you in linking the weekly theme to the broader narrative of Scripture, highlighting its connection to Jesus. And finally, every week wraps up with a reading from Psalms and a prompt designed to encourage prayer and reflection.

FRAMING PERSPECTIVES

**What kind of story do you think the book of Ruth tells?
Why?**

Challenging Assumptions

For many people, the book of Ruth is primarily seen in one of two ways: First, it is often understood as a love story between Ruth and Boaz. Boaz, a man of wealth and stature, notices Ruth's diligence, gradually falls in love with her, ensures her well-being, and ultimately marries her. Or, second, as a story that portrays the Christian ideal of a loyal and virtuous woman who clings to her mother-in-law during the harshest of times.

When read with these assumptions, we risk sentimentalizing the story and missing the extreme nature of Ruth's choices and the larger message about the boundless love of God. Her story is not driven by romance or idyllic femininity; it centers around radical faith and the biblical idea of covenant loyalty. The book of Ruth is a theologically rich story, revealing how God's perfect love unfolds the lives of ordinary, vulnerable people.

LITERARY OVERVIEW

Author: Unknown

Genre: Historical Narrative

Date: Scholars are divided on when the book was written. Some suggest authorship during or shortly after David's reign, around **1000-900BCE**, while others claim much later around 500-400BCE. Several internal clues support an early authorship date, as the book features archaic Hebrew and idiomatic expressions found in Judges and Samuel.

Purpose: The book of Ruth serves as a reminder to Israel of their need for covenant faithfulness, emphasizing that God's redemption is always available.

Literary Features

Ruth is one of the most technically composed books in the Old Testament, with significant wordplay and a higher proportion of dialogue to narration than most biblical texts.

The entire plot of the book mirrors a set of laws found in Deuteronomy 24:16-25:10 emphasizing themes of:

LITERARY OVERVIEW

- Justice for the vulnerable
- Provision for gleaners
- Redemption and family responsibility
- Levirate marriage ¹

The book is also arranged as a chiasm, a pattern of ideas in which the first and last elements mirror each other, the second and fourth elements mirror each other, and the center is the story's focal point.

A Family History (1:1-5)

B Naomi returns to her land with Ruth (1:6-22)

C Ruth and Boaz in the fields (2:1-23)

C' Ruth and Boaz at the threshing floor (3:1-18)

B' Boaz redeems the land and marries Ruth (4:1-17)

A' Family History (4:18-22) ²

At the center of the chiasm lies a covenantal relationship, highlighting Ruth's main idea, where **God's provision and human obedience come together to begin the process of redemption.**



CHAPTER
— ONE —
TRAGEDY

RUTH 1 TRAGEDY

Setting & Context

The story of Ruth unfolds during the era of the Judges, a tumultuous time that followed Israel's initial entry into the Promised Land. This period was marked by Israel's failure to follow God's instructions to eradicate places of idol worship and drive the Canaanites from the land. Their disobedience led to a relentless cycle of rebellion, subjugation by their enemies, desperate pleas for deliverance, and eventual rescue by God.

With each iteration of this cycle, Israel sank further into moral decay, forgetting the incredible acts of God that had once used to deliver them. The book of Judges chronicles this era, painting a picture of one of the darkest and most trying chapters in Israel's history.

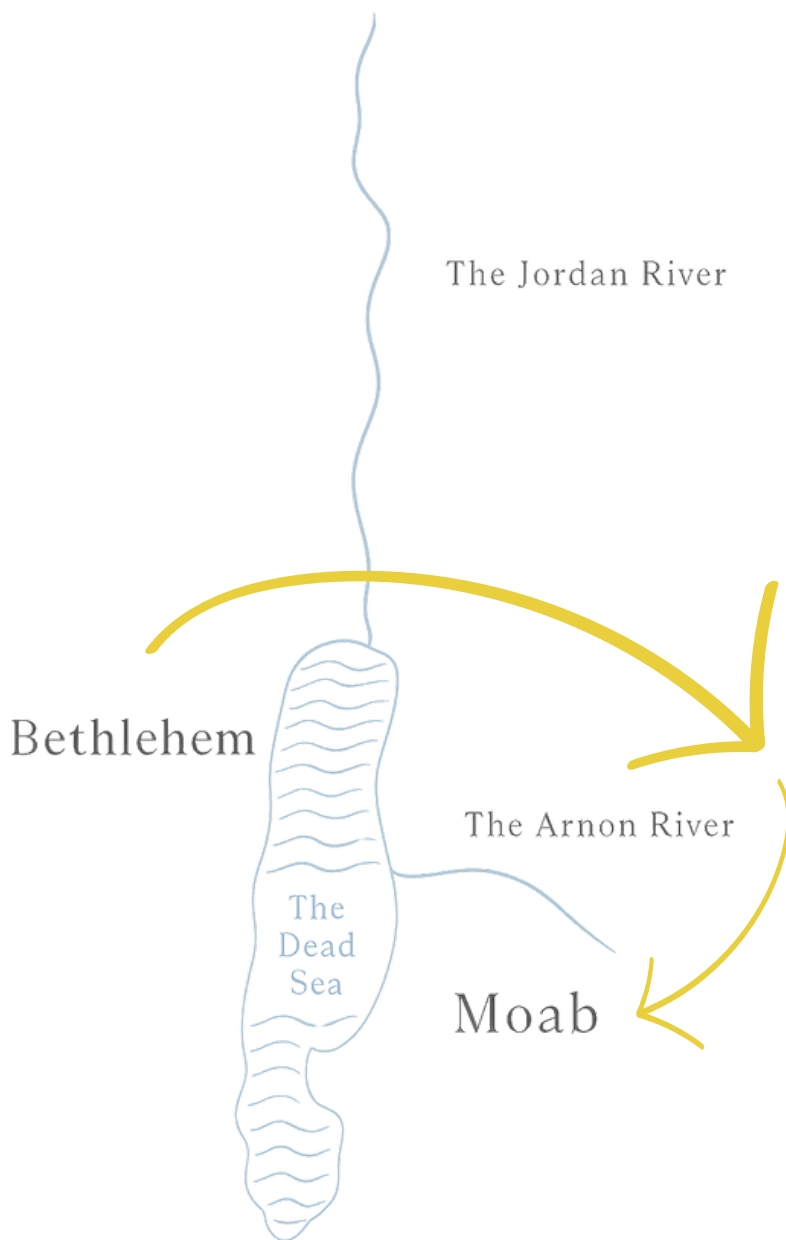
Read Judges 11:30-31; 34-39; 19:22-29 and 21:25. What do these passages reveal about the spiritual condition of Israel and their loyalty to God during the time of the Judges?

RUTH 1 TRAGEDY

God's people had turned their backs on Him. They forgot His commandments and chased after foreign gods, placing their self-interest above all else. This is the bleak and lawless background that sets the stage for Ruth's story.

Read Ruth 1:1-2. Ironically, Bethlehem, which literally means "**House of Bread**," became a wasteland. In desperation, an Israelite named Elimelek gathered his family and departed in search of better land. Their journey led them to the country of Moab, nearly 50 miles away by foot. The original hearers of this story would have been shocked that an Israelite sought sanctuary in Moab.

Read the Moabite origin story in Genesis 19:30–38, then read Numbers 22:4b–6, and Deuteronomy 23:3. How would this background information have shaped ancient Israelites expectations of this story?



The 50 mile journey from Bethlehem to Moab

RUTH 1

TRAGEDY

In Hebrew storytelling, names often carry significant meaning. Use an online Bible dictionary to find the meanings of each individual's name.

Elimelek

Naomi

Mahlon

Killion

Ruth

Orpah

RUTH 1 TRAGEDY

Read Ruth 1:3-5. Naomi experienced profound loss with her husband and both sons dying in a foreign land. What emotions or questions might she be wrestling with?

Read Ruth 1:6-7. What does this show you about God's character in seasons of loss? What does it look like to trust that God still provides, even when everything feels broken?

RUTH 1 TRAGEDY

key term



Chesed: Covenant Love, Faithfulness

Read Ruth 1:8-14. Naomi asked God to show **chesed** to Ruth and Orpah (v. 8-9), but just a few verses later said the Lord's hand was against her (v. 13). Have you ever felt like God is good to others but not to you? How did that internal conflict impact your faith?

RUTH 1 TRAGEDY

Read Ruth 1:15-22. Ruth's words to Naomi were more than a personal pledge; they mirror covenant language. What stands out to you about Ruth's commitment? What aspects of your own comfort, identity, or history might you need to let go of to follow God more closely?

Naomi renamed herself Mara meaning “**Bitter**”, claiming that the Lord had brought her back empty. How do her words reflect both her grief and her theology? Have you ever felt emptied by God, and how did it affect your relationship with Him?

RUTH 1

TRAGEDY

The chapter ends with a turning point: they arrive "as the barley harvest was beginning." Why does this detail matter? What does it suggest about God's timing, and how might this encourage you if you're in a season of waiting or rebuilding?

The Hebrew word **chesed** is often translated as "Kindness," but it describes God's covenantal love that is faithful, sacrificial, and loyal even when we are not. Where have you seen God's undeserved love in your story?

TRACING THE THEME

Tragedy

Ruth 1 is filled with tragic and devastating loss, famine, displacement, death, and the unraveling of a family. It serves as a raw and realistic reflection of the grief and heartache we encounter today. Tragedy can be found throughout the entire Biblical storyline, from the pain of personal loss to the exile of a whole nation. While the Bible is a book full of tragedy, it is not about tragedy. The Bible is a book about a God who does not desire us to remain in a broken and tragic state. Tragedy is not the end of the story.

The Bible shows us how God relentlessly pursues a relationship with us to restore what has been lost. And in Jesus, that pursuit becomes personal. He shared in our suffering, took on our sin, and provided redemption not only for the future but for today. While it might seem that the greatest tragedy in our lives is our suffering, turning away from the Savior who gave everything for us is an even greater heartache. For followers of Jesus, the imperfect life we face today is the closest experience to hell that we will ever endure, because in Him, we have hope of restoration, the promise of healing, and the gift of eternal life, even when all seems lost.

TRACING THE THEME

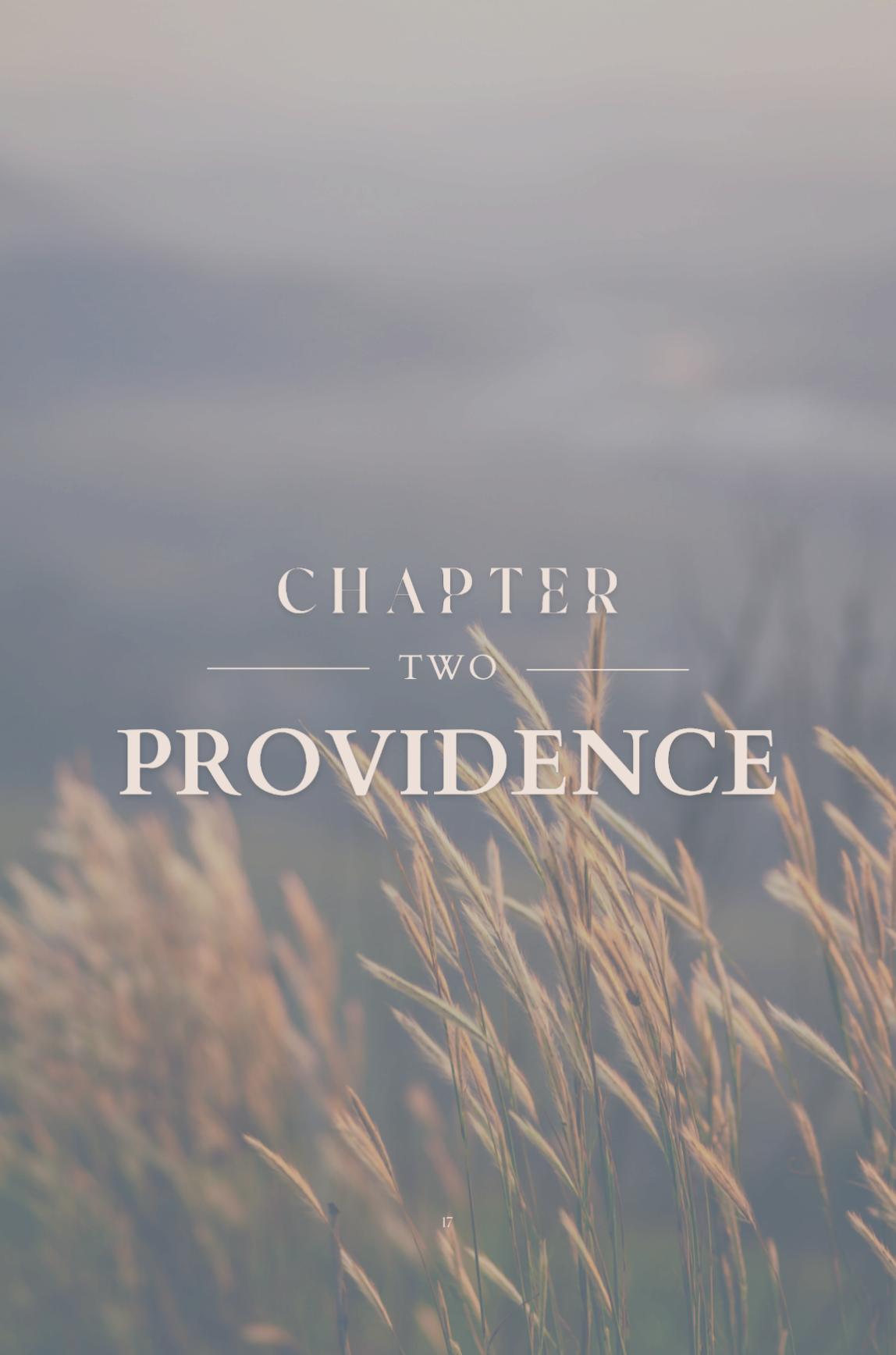
Read Lamentations 3:19-24. How does this passage help you understand God's presence in seasons of struggle and tragedy?

Read 2 Corinthians 1:3-5. What does it reveal about the kind of comfort that God offers in the midst of grief?

TRACING THE THEME

Read Hebrews 4:15–16. Hebrews reminds us that Jesus suffered like us. What does it mean to you that your Jesus is familiar with sorrow? How could this understanding alter your approach to God during hard times?

Read Psalm 42. Write down any personal grief or sadness you are experiencing right now and take some time to pray and be honest with God about your struggle.



CHAPTER
— TWO —
PROVIDENCE

RUTH 2

PROVIDENCE

Sacred Timing

Ruth 1 concluded with a statement that “the barley harvest was beginning”, marking a pivotal moment in the development of Ruth’s story. This timing aligns with Israel’s **Festival of Weeks**, a religious holiday steeped in the history of the Exodus.

This festival celebrates when Israel received the law from God on Mount Sinai as told in Exodus 19 and 20. Today, the Jewish community continues to honor this festival, commemorating the gift of the law by engaging in an all-night study of the book of Ruth.

The return of Ruth and Naomi from Moab at this exact time was not mere happenstance. It was divine providence, ensuring they arrived precisely when they could receive the support they so desperately needed. Their return also served as a living memorial to God’s law. Remember, Ruth found herself in Israel during a time characterized by wickedness in Israel. Her story is positioned as a call to covenantal living, a powerful rebuke of lawlessness, and a prophetic glimpse of the kind of kingdom God intends to establish.

RUTH 2

PROVIDENCE

Laws for Provision

Ruth and Naomi were widows, and Ruth was also a foreigner. By ancient standards, they were at the lowest rung of society. A woman's security depended on her father, then her husband, and later her son, but Ruth and Naomi had none of these support systems. This was more than just an economic issue. It was a matter of survival. Without a male protector, women faced a high risk of homelessness, abuse, and starvation.

In the ancient world, there were welfare systems in place to support the needy, but Israel's approach was much more radical. There was no emphasis on assigning blame to determine someone's eligibility for assistance.¹ And responsibility for aid did not fall on those who had caused or contributed to the issue. Instead, **anyone** with resources had a duty to help those in poverty. Giving to the poor was bound to their system of worship and a measure of one's faithfulness to God's covenant.

Read Deut 15:4; 24:18-22 and 26:12-15. What was God's intention for the poor in Israel? Why do you think God grounded charity in remembrance and worship?

RUTH 2

PROVIDENCE

How does this background information deepen your understanding of what God was doing in Ruth's story? What insights does it provide about how God can work quietly through obedience, timing, and vulnerable people to fulfill His plans?

RUTH 2

PROVIDENCE

key term

מִקְרֵה

Miqreh: An Unforeseen Event, Happenstance

Read Ruth 2:1–4. In verse 3, the Hebrew word **miqreh** is used to describe Ruth's arrival at Boaz's field. Do you think the narrator actually believes this was chance? Why might the author use the language of coincidence to describe something so intentional?

RUTH 2 PROVIDENCE

Read Ruth 2:5-13. Ruth referred to herself as an outsider (v. 10), yet, Boaz spoke of her as someone who has taken refuge under the protection of Israel's God (v. 12). What does this suggest about how belonging in God's kingdom is defined?

Boaz prayed a blessing over Ruth, asking God to repay her for what she had done (v. 12). Then, through his own actions, became part of that provision. What does this teach you about how God often answers prayers?

RUTH 2

PROVIDENCE

Read Ruth 2:14-23. Boaz exceeded the instructions of the law, sharing a meal with Ruth, ensuring her safety, and instructing his workers to leave behind extra grain for her (vv. 14–16). What do his actions reveal about the kind of generosity God desires from His people?

When Naomi heard about Boaz's kindness, she responded with blessing and recognition of God's **chesed** (v. 20). How does this moment mark a turning point in Naomi's faith?

RUTH 2

PROVIDENCE

Ruth "just so happened" to glean in Boaz's field, Boaz "just so happened" to arrive while she's there, and Naomi "just so happened" to recognize Boaz as a relative. What does this pattern reveal about how God works in the small things to bring about something greater? How does this encourage you in your current season of life?

God's providence often involves placing us in the right situation, around the right people, at the right time. Can you recall a moment in your life when you realized that God had been preparing something for you long before you were aware of it?

TRACING THE THEME

Providence

Do you ever wonder what God is doing, or if He is in control at all? From the beginning, God has carried out His plans through human weakness and unlikely people. This approach is confusing, there is no doubt about that. But, there is comfort in knowing that regardless of our decisions, God's plan for redemption will never unravel. Everything is held together in Jesus.

We expect to see God in the big things but God's providence is also present in moments that don't feel miraculous. God is not absent in the ordinary. While we may not understand every step of His plan, we can have confidence because the Bible attests to His faithfulness in bringing us a Savior.

Read Genesis 50:20. Joseph had been sold into slavery, framed for a crime he did not commit and imprisoned. How does his perspective help you understand how God can use painful things for good?

TRACING THE THEME

Read Proverbs 16:9. Where do you see this reflected in Ruth's story? What does it look like for you to have faith that God is directing your steps?

Read Matthew 10:29-31. Do you believe that God is with you in ordinary, overlooked moments? How do these words from Jesus encourage you?

CHAPTER

THREE

RISK

RUTH 3

RISK

The Threshing Floor

Once the barley had been harvested, it had to be processed. Threshing involved beating the grain with wooden flails to separate the kernels from the husks. Winnowing followed, using large forks to toss the grain into the air, allowing the wind to blow away the lighter chaff while the heavier grain fell to the ground. This activity was labor-intensive and social, often bringing the community together in a shared effort. After the day's hard work, men stayed overnight to guard the grain. This communal gathering had a reputation for becoming a backdrop for sexual encounters. Some cultures, like the Canaanites, used threshing floors when participating in sexual acts related to fertility cults. ¹

If a woman was found at the threshing floor during the night, she risked being branded as a prostitute. This label could lead to public shaming, destroying any chances of future marriage and long-term support. In extreme cases it could have resulted in the severe punishment of being stoned.

RUTH 3 RISK



*Wall painting of a threshing scene from the Tomb of Menna in
Thebes*

RUTH 3 RISK

Read Ruth 3:1-5. Naomi wanted to find “a home” for Ruth. The word “home” in this passage is the Hebrew word for “**rest**”. Rest implies not just marriage, but wholeness, belonging, and peace. What does Naomi’s desire for Ruth’s tell you about how her heart has changed since she first returned to Bethlehem?

Carefully review the exact instructions that Naomi gave to Ruth and note them below.

RUTH 3 RISK

Read Ruth 3:6-9. Observe Ruth's actions, note the similarities and differences between what Naomi told her to do and what Ruth actually did.

key term

כַּנָּפַי

Kanaph· Wing, Covering

RUTH 3

RISK

The Corner of the Garment

At the end of verse 9, Ruth commanded Boaz to "Spread the corner of your garment over me." In Hebrew, the word is **kanaph**, meaning "**wing**." This phrase is an idiom that signifies a marriage proposal. When a man placed his garment over a woman, it symbolized his protection of her and willingness to consummate the marriage.

The author deliberately chose to use the term **kanaph** to describe the corner of the garment, intentionally linking it back to an earlier moment in Ruth 2:12 when Boaz prayed that Ruth would find refuge "under the **wings** of the God of Israel." Ruth implored Boaz to be the human agent of the very shelter he wished for her. In doing so, she sought personal and spiritual rest for herself and Naomi.

Ruth's request was audacious, but it was also dangerous. Had Boaz misunderstood her intentions or rejected her appeal, she could have faced public disgrace, rejection, or worse. As a foreigner, she had no legal standing to compel him to act as a kinsman-redeemer.

RUTH 3

RISK

Kinsman Redeemer

Leviticus 25:25 explains the role of a kinsman-redeemer. This process occurred if an Israelite became poor and was compelled to sell some or all of their property for survival. One of their closest relatives was responsible for buying back what they had sold to ensure the land remained within the family. The act of redeeming land was intended to secure a family's inheritance and identity in the covenant community. To the Israelites, land was more than a piece of property, it was a tangible part of their promised inheritance from God. Each tribe and family held a designated portion of the land. Allowing it to slip permanently from their possession signified that they had lost their place within God's promise.

Land Ownership

When a father passed away, the ownership of his land was traditionally transferred to his surviving family members. The first in line to inherit were the sons. However, if no sons existed, the daughters would inherit the land, but she was forbidden from marrying outside her tribe. In the absence of daughters, the inheritance would pass to the brothers, and if they were also unavailable, uncles would be next in line.

RUTH 3

RISK

Interestingly, wives were excluded from this hierarchy of inheritance. This process was designed to ensure that each family and tribe maintained their ancestral land holdings, preventing any tribe from being oppressed due to a mass loss of land. The author of Ruth does not disclose how Naomi came to own their land, but it can be presumed that all other potential heirs had passed away and only distant relatives remained.

Ruth did not follow Naomi's instructions exactly. She took an extra step by directly requesting Boaz to redeem her without any legal standing (v. 9). Why do you think she made that choice? What does this reveal about her faith?

RUTH 3 RISK

Ruth's actions at the threshing floor were filled with great risk. Where in your life is God calling you to take faithful risks?

Read Ruth 3:10-18. Although Boaz agreed, he did not rush to act on Ruth's request and wanted to follow the proper process. What risks are involved in his decision to wait? Why do you think it was important for him to handle the situation this way?

RUTH 3

RISK

God's "wings" are a place of refuge, not control. Is there an area of your life where it's hard to trust God's protection? How can you hold that tension, relying on His care while still taking proactive steps in faith, like Naomi and Ruth did?

What has this chapter taught you about how risk and refuge often go hand in hand? Where do you need this reminder the most in your life?

TRACING THE THEME

Risk

In chapter 3, Ruth took incredible personal risk. But her risk was not reckless; it was rooted in courageous faith that God sees the powerless and acts on their behalf. Faith filled risk is found all throughout the pages of Scripture, teaching us that faith is not passive, it moves us forward. Faith causes us to act out of trust, not out of certainty. God instructed Abraham to leave his home without knowing his destination. Jesus asked Peter to step out of the boat to walk on water.

These stories are a reminder that where there is faith-filled risk, there is refuge. Refuge is not the absence of danger or the benefits of physical comforts. Refuge means presence. The presence of a God who is with His people in the unknown, and who shelters them in every storm. Having faith does not guarantee an easy journey or a predictable outcome, but it does mean that we are never alone.

Read Jeremiah 20:11-12. Jeremiah risked everything to follow God's call as a prophet. He was beaten, imprisoned (Jer 20:2), rejected by his own people (Jer 20:7-8), and left in a cistern to die (Jer 38:6).

TRACING THE THEME

Despite all of this, Jeremiah found refuge in God's presence. How does his perspective challenge the way you define "refuge"?

Read Mark 5:25-34 and Hebrews 11:6. What do these passages reveal about what God values most in our relationship with Him? Where might you need to step out in faith and take a risk in your current season?



CHAPTER
— FOUR —
REDEMPTION

RUTH 4

REDEMPTION

Levirate Marriage

Deuteronomy 25:5-10 outlines the law concerning levirate marriage. According to this law, if a man passed away without leaving behind any children, it was the duty of his brother to marry the widow and father a child in his deceased brother's name. The goal was to preserve the family line and to prevent a widow from becoming destitute. Similar laws in some ancient Near Eastern cultures, like the Hittites, protected widows, even extending this obligation to the father-in-law.

Land acquisition was not typically a part of levirate marriage agreements. The primary concern was producing an heir for the widow. The book of Ruth stands out because it blurs the lines of the levirate marriage with the duties of a kinsman-redeemer. It's not just about redeeming the land. People must be redeemed, and restored. ¹

Naomi and Ruth experience a microcosm of the gospel, being brought from emptiness to fullness, and from isolation to relationship with God. Boaz initiates redemption, bears the cost, protects the vulnerable, fulfills the law, and secures an inheritance, each a shadow of Christ's redemptive work through the cross.

RUTH 4 REDEMPTION

Read Ruth 4:1–6 and Leviticus 25:25. Under the law, a redeemer or “goel” could redeem land without the obligation of marrying a widow. Why do you think Boaz decided to incorporate this into the duties he is proposing to the closer relative?

key term



Goel: To Redeem, To Buy Back

RUTH 4

REDEMPTION

If the closer relative had redeemed the land but refused to take Ruth, what would that have left undone? How does this help you understand the fullness of redemption we have through Jesus?

Boaz brought the elders and townspeople together at the city gate, a place of legal authority, to carry out the redemption of Ruth and Naomi. What does Boaz's public commitment teach you about demonstrating faith and integrity?

RUTH 4

REDEMPTION

Remembering the Dead

In the ancient world, being remembered after death was essential for leaving a legacy, and securing one's place in the afterlife. In Egyptian tradition, the dead entered the Hall of Two Truths, where their heart was weighed against the feather of Ma'at. If the heart failed the test, it was devoured by Ammut, the "Devourer of the Dead," erasing the person from existence.²

In Ruth 4:10, Boaz stated his intention to redeem Elimelek's land and marry Ruth "so that the name of the dead will not disappear from among his family or from his hometown." This carries a striking parallel to being forgotten and having one's name erased, which was portrayed as a fate worse than death itself. Preserving a name meant securing identity, belonging, and continuity within the covenant community eternally.

RUTH 4

REDEMPTION



The Hall of Two Truths from The Egyptian Book of the Dead

RUTH 4 REDEMPTION

Read Ruth 4:7-22 and Revelation 3:5. In both passages a name is preserved as an act of redemption, first by Boaz, then through Christ. How does this shape the way to understand your place in God's story?

In verse 17 the women of the town say “Naomi has a son” even though the child is Ruth's. Why does Naomi receive the child as an heir, and what does this reveal about Ruth's humility?

RUTH 4

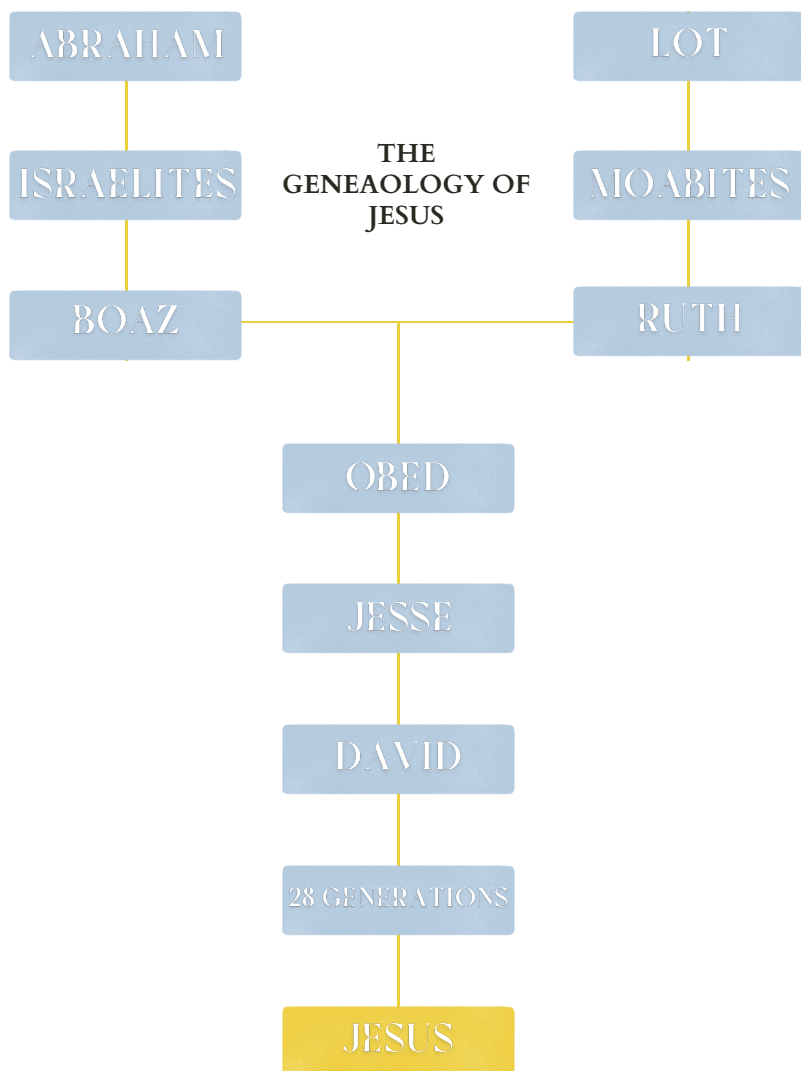
REDEMPTION

Despite many in Israel neglecting the covenant duties, Ruth, a foreigner, showed **chesed** through her risk-taking, sacrifice, and loyalty. What does this suggest about who God chooses to work through and what He values in a broken world?

The book concludes with a genealogy tracing the lineage to David and eventually to Jesus (Matt 1:5-6). How does this conclusion challenge the assumptions you had at the beginning of the study about the book's purpose?

RUTH 4

REDEMPTION



RUTH 4

REDEMPTION

At the start of the book, Ruth and Naomi had lost everything and together they faced emotional grief, poverty, displacement, a lack of identity and future. And yet, through faithful obedience and acts of **chesed**, God began to redeem what was lost. How is God calling you to step into obedience in the midst of your struggles and darkness today?

Read Ephesians 1:7. Jesus is our ultimate Redeemer, he sacrificed everything to bring us into God's family. How does seeing Jesus as your **goel** reshape how you understand your story and the significance of your personal redemption?

TRACING THE THEME

Redemption

In a time when political leadership was unstable, religious life was compromised, and moral clarity was scarce, no one would have expected this act of righteousness. Yet Boaz remembered God's commands, pursued justice, and placed the well-being of others before himself. Through his faithfulness to God, Naomi's family line was restored, Ruth's future was secured, and tragedy was reversed.

To redeem is to take what is lost, broken, or forgotten and restore it. Jesus does this by entering our story, not out of obligation or legal duty, but from a place of **chesed**. He came to earth, endured suffering, and died on our behalf. He was resurrected on the third day, overcoming the forces of darkness and death. Jesus lives! And because He lives, He is still working. Redemption happens now, in real lives, in real time.

That's why we call Him **Redeemer** (**goel**). It is a declaration of what Jesus has done and continues to do. Redemption is always available, no matter how dark the world is now or how desperate your circumstances may be. This is the story of Ruth, and the story of the whole Bible.

TRACING THE THEME

Read Job 19:25-27. Job spoke of a redeemer long before Jesus. What does this teach you about the story and purpose of Scripture? How does this deepen your faith in your current situation?

Read Psalm 103. What has God redeemed in your life? Write a prayer of gratitude for the redemption you've experienced and ask God to continue to reveal himself to you in the areas that feel incomplete.

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