

WHAT
THE **OLD**
TESTAMENT

AUTHORS REALLY
CARED ABOUT

A **SURVEY** of Jesus' Bible

JASON S. DEROUCHIE

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What the Old Testament Authors Really Cared About: A Survey of Jesus' Bible

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CONTENTS

Figures and Maps / 9
Preface / 13
Abbreviations / 19
Contributors / 21
Book Overview / 23

Introduction

1. Jesus' Bible: An Overview (DeRouchie) / 26

Law

The Old Covenant Established: What the Law Is Really About / 55

2. Genesis (Dempster) / 60
3. Exodus (Turner) / 80
4. Leviticus (Mooney/DeRouchie) / 102
5. Numbers (Schmutzer) / 122
6. Deuteronomy (DeRouchie) / 140

Prophets

The Old Covenant Enforced: What the Prophets Are Really About / 163

7. Joshua (Seevers) / 172
8. Judges (Miller) / 186
9. 1–2 Samuel (Hays) / 200
10. 1–2 Kings (Fowler/DeRouchie) / 218
11. Jeremiah (Yates) / 238
12. Ezekiel (Sprinkle) / 260
13. Isaiah (Smith) / 278
14. The Twelve (Dempster) / 294

Writings

The Old Covenant Enjoyed: What the Writings Are Really About / 319

15. **Ruth** (Miller/DeRouchie) / 326
16. **Psalms** (Crutchfield) / 336
17. **Job** (Curtis) / 358
18. **Proverbs** (Estes) / 370
19. **Ecclesiastes** (Curtis) / 382
20. **Song of Songs** (Estes) / 392
21. **Lamentations** (Aaron) / 400
22. **Daniel** (Seevers) / 408
23. **Esther** (Smith) / 420
24. **Ezra-Nehemiah** (Aaron/DeRouchie) / 428
25. **1–2 Chronicles** (Bolen) / 442

Appendixes

- Appendix 1: Extended Figures / 463
- Appendix 2: Key Old Testament Chapters / 469
- Appendix 3: KINGDOM Bible Reading Plan / 471
- Appendix 4: The Law, Prophets, and Writings at a Glance / 477
- Appendix 5: Key Old Testament Themes in English Bible Order / 479
- Appendix 6: Chapter Index of Key Words and Concepts / 485
- Appendix 7: Chapter and Topical Indexes of Photographs / 491

RUTH

Who?

The book of Ruth is an anonymous work and gives no specific clues to its author. Jewish tradition suggests Samuel, although references to David (Ruth 4:17, 22) make it unlikely that he is the author. The Hebrew idioms and syntax suggest an author during the monarchy.

When?

The author began his book with the chronological marker, “In the days when the judges ruled” (1:1); this places the events somewhere between 1380 and 1050 B.C. Although the story no doubt existed in oral form prior to the monarchy, it was written in its final form after David began to reign. The Hebrew literary style points toward a composition sometime during the monarchy, though some degree of linguistic updating probably occurred later and its placement in the Writings is a post-exilic phenomenon.

Where?

Elements of the story took place in both Israel and Moab. Ironically, Naomi and her family left the Judean city of Bethlehem (lit., “house of bread”) because of a famine and dwelt in Moab (east of the Dead Sea), which was one of

the nations that oppressed Israel during the period of the judges. While there, Naomi’s son married Ruth, a Moabitess, who, after the death of her husband, decided to return to Bethlehem with Naomi. This move was not only a geographical journey, but also a spiritual one to the land and to Yahweh, the God of Israel.

Why?

The book of Ruth provided Israel with a telling contrast to the book of Judges. Not only had Yahweh preserved a remnant of people who did what was right in his eyes, but he would also use them to provide a “kinsman redeemer” in later generations for the nation as a whole. Throughout the book they progressively enjoyed the blessings of Yahweh for covenant faithfulness and gave promise of more to come.

In its present location, directly following the Prophets and standing as a prelude to the Writings, Ruth also:

1. Supplied an early analogy of how David’s royal line experienced exile and then redemption;
2. Focused attention on the Davidic promises;
3. Built hope for full kingdom restoration.

CHAPTER 15

RUTH

Chris A. Miller and
Jason S. DeRouchie

Carefully Crafted Verses from Ruth

In the days when the judges ruled ...
(Ruth 1:1).

“Where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God” (Ruth 1:16).

“The LORD repay you for what you have done, and a full reward be given you by the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge!” (Ruth 2:12).

“May he be blessed by the LORD, whose kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead! ... The man is a close relative of ours, one of our redeemers” (Ruth 2:20).

“A son has been born to Naomi.” They named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David (Ruth 4:17).

The Author of Ruth Highlighted *Covenant Faithfulness and Yahweh’s Gift of a Redeemer*

The book of Ruth is deceptively powerful. When set within its historical and biblical context, what appears to be a simple love story between two people becomes a revolutionary tale that sounds the promise of national redemption. The book is positioned in the Hebrew canon in the Writings, likely due to its hope-filled

THE AUTHOR OF RUTH ...

- Highlighted *covenant faithfulness and Yahweh’s gift of a redeemer*.
- Emphasized *Yahweh’s faithfulness* to bless the faithful and to fulfill his promises.

focus on the life of the remnant and the faithfulness of God. Nevertheless, the author placed the book chronologically “in the days when the judges ruled” (Ruth 1:1), and when naturally compared with the characters in the book of Judges, Ruth and Boaz stand out like counter-revolutionaries.

In a day when “everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (Judg. 21:25), there were at least two people who did what was right in God’s eyes.

The narrative is about two women, Naomi and Ruth, and their experience of redemption through their kinsman, Boaz. The message of the book, however, is much more profound.

Figure 15.1. Ruth at a Glance

Introduction	Body	Conclusion	
Ruth 1:1–22	2:1–4:12	4:13–17	4:18–22
Naomi emptied	Ruth and Boaz marry	Naomi filled	Genealogy of David

Dwelling in Bethlehem of Judah but caught in the midst of famine, Naomi followed her husband away from the “house of bread” and the place of redemptive hope (Mic. 5:2; cf. 1 Sam. 16:1, 12–13) into “exile” within Moab, one of Israel’s oppressors. There her son married a foreigner named Ruth, who, upon the death of her father-in-law and husband, chose to follow Naomi back to Bethlehem: “Your people shall be my people, and your God my God” (Ruth 1:16). Ruth recognized that her decision likely meant she would remain a single woman without the benefit of male protection or provision. In light of the horrors of Israelite society during the period of the judges, such an act was a fearful thing (2:9, 22) and a testament of supreme faith in Yahweh, in whom she sought refuge (2:12).

God rewarded Ruth by bringing her into the field of a man who ruled his “kingdom” from a position of virtue and servant leadership. Boaz was the antithesis of the typical man of Judges. He did not selfishly abuse his workers (2:4) but gently provided for their needs (2:8–9, 14–16). Every time Ruth encountered Boaz she came to him *empty* but left *full* (2:14, 17; 3:17; 4:13). He unselfishly gave, cared, protected, and redeemed, all under the umbrella of faithfulness to the covenant of Yahweh.



Naomi said to Ruth, “Where did you glean today? ... Blessed be the man who took notice of you” (Ruth 2:19). *Women working in a field near Lebonah.*



“Then [Naomi] arose with her daughters-in-law to return from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the fields of Moab that the LORD had visited his people and given them food” (Ruth 1:6). *The fields of Moab south of the Arnon.*

In response, Ruth did not play the part of the foreign temptress who seduced the Israelite Boaz from his calling. Rather, Ruth was a “worthy woman” who inspired this Bethlehemite to follow the covenant and who, in the end, brought him honor at the city gate (3:11; 4:11; cf. Prov. 12:4; 31:10, 23).

Although Boaz would not have been forced to marry Ruth, he willingly did so in obedience to the spirit of the law of levirate marriage, wherein a man assumed the wife of a deceased relative in order to protect this relative’s property and family and to continue his line at great cost to himself (Ruth 4:1–14; cf. Deut. 25:5–10). Naomi pointed to this principle when she told Ruth, “The man is a close relative of ours, *one our redeemers*” (Ruth 2:20; cf. 3:9, 12; Lev. 25:25).

This image of the “redeemer” provides part of the background for the work of Jesus, through whom God saved his own from destruction. Directly after his oracle about the Suffering Servant, who “has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows” (Isa. 53:4), the prophet Isaiah declared (54:4–5): “Fear not, for you will not be ashamed; be not confounded, for you will not be

disgraced; for you will forget the shame of your youth, and the reproach of your widowhood you will remember no more. For your Maker is your husband, the LORD of hosts is his name; and the Holy One of Israel is your *Redeemer*, the God of the whole earth he is called.” Ruth went to Bethlehem, seeking refuge under Yahweh’s “wings” (Ruth 2:12), and Yahweh provided her with a tangible expression of his care under the “wings” of Boaz, a kinsman “redeemer” (3:9). God’s protection of Ruth through Boaz was designed to give great hope of God’s faithfulness to the reader.

James coined the perfect caption for this story when he wrote, “Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world” (James 1:27).



Naomi said to Ruth: “Is not Boaz our relative? ... See, he is winnowing barley tonight at the threshing floor” (Ruth 3:2). A threshing floor with sledges and winnowing instruments.

The Author of Ruth Emphasized *Yahweh's Faithfulness to Bless the Faithful and to Fulfill His Promises*

The Blessing of the Faithful

The entire book of Ruth draws attention to Yahweh's amazing faithfulness both to bless those who remain loyal to him and to fulfill all his promises. One way this is accomplished is by building an intentional correlation between calls for God's blessing in response to covenant faithfulness and details of a positive divine response. For example, following the death of her husband and son, Naomi blessed Ruth by declaring, "May the LORD deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me" (Ruth 1:8). Similarly, in reaction to Ruth's self-sacrificing care of her mother-in-law, Boaz proclaimed, "the LORD repay you for what you have done, and a full reward be given you by the LORD" (2:12). In turn, Ruth found favor in the eyes of Boaz (2:13) enjoyed provision from his hand (3:17), received his protective care as a husband, and enjoyed the blessing of a child (4:13).

A similar pattern is seen in the life of Boaz, who unrelentingly served everyone around him. Following his initial care for Ruth, Naomi prayed, "May he be blessed by the LORD, whose kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead!" (2:20). Little did she know how greatly God would answer this prayer, for through his and Ruth's offspring would come David (4:17) and ultimately Jesus, the promised son of David (Matt. 1:1, 5–6, 16).

The Fulfilling of Promises

Significantly, upon Boaz' servant-hearted declaration of intent to marry Ruth, the residents of Bethlehem asserted, "May the LORD make the woman, who is coming into your house, like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the house of Israel" (Ruth 4:11). While historically proclaimed before the nation's destruction in exile, the placement of the book of Ruth *after* the Prophets allows these words to cast hope for the full restoration of God's people. This ray of light is further highlighted when we learn that Boaz's and Ruth's son Obed was the grandfather of David, the Old Testament's royal image of hope (4:17, 22; cf. 2 Sam. 7:12–13; Jer. 23:5–6; 30:9; Ezek. 34:23–24; 37:24–25; Isa. 9:6–7; Hos. 3:5; Amos 9:11–12). God's blessing of Ruth and Boaz for their faithfulness would ultimately result in blessing to the world!

In contrast to Judges, where death was overwhelmingly prevalent, the book of Ruth finished with the promise of new life and had "David" as

its final word (Ruth 4:22). With this stroke of genius, the writer sparked the reader's imagination. David would do on a *national* level what Boaz had done on a *personal* one. No difference existed in character, only in the size of the stage. The same godliness that drove Boaz would drive David to bless his nation and redeem their lives from the moral chaos of the judges. God continued to be faithful, and the characters of Boaz and David supplied hope in the son of David whose godly character and sacrificial leadership would ultimately redeem all believers from the chaos of sin and death.

This fact is also highlighted by the ten-person genealogy that ends the book. Its very presence recalls the ten-person genealogy in Genesis 5 and

and the nine-person genealogy in Genesis 11 that focus on the line of promise (from Adam to Noah and from Shem to Terah, father of Abra[ha]m). Furthermore, its makeup, starting with Perez and ending with David, emphasizes the hope of redemption. Perez was the grandson of Jacob and son of Judah and Tamar, whose own story involved the institution of levirate marriage and the role of the kinsman redeemer (Gen. 38). Moreover, the link with the patriarchal narratives in general and Judah in particular brought focus to God's promise of a royal deliver who would ultimately set all evil right

and provide satisfying relief to those in an oppressed and oppressive world. As Yahweh promised Abraham, "Your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed" (22:17–18). Or in Jacob's blessing of Judah (49:8, 10): "Judah, your brothers shall praise you; your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; your father's sons shall bow down before you.... The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples."

Yahweh had redeemed the ancestors of David from their temporary "exile" in Moab, and he would do so again for those under Persian rule. He would raise up the promised Son of David and would, through him, redeem and restore. The story of Ruth, therefore, provides a hope-filled analogy for those living apart from the complete fulfillment of the restoration promises.

The New Testament opens, "The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham" (Matt. 1:1). This abbreviated genealogy captures the trajectory of redemptive history that the story of Ruth embraces and through which we find hope. "Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of David the king.... Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ" (1:5–6, 16).



“Then the women said to Naomi, ‘Blessed be the LORD, who has not left you this day without a redeemer.... He shall be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age, for your daughter-in-law who loves you ... has given birth to him!’” (Ruth 4:14–15). *Barley in the field near Kiriath Gat.*

Conclusion

Placed within its biblical context, the book of Ruth is clearly more than a story of the salvation of Naomi’s family line. God was working in ways larger than any in Ruth’s day probably ever anticipated. In nearly every way,

the story of Ruth contrasts and answers the message of Judges and therefore provides a helpful prelude to the hope of the Writings. After the extended testimony in the Prophets to the ominous chaos in Israel and the nations, the book of Ruth provides great encouragement by disclosing that a remnant, faithful to Yahweh, did exist and that God was in the process of fulfilling the Davidic promises.

KEY WORDS AND CONCEPTS FOR REVIEW

Counter-revolutionaries

Worthy woman

Levirate marriage

Kinsman redeemer

Pure religion

Covenant faithfulness

Covenant blessings

Royal image of hope

Davidic promises

Genealogy

Exile

Prelude to the Writings

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