# A STUDY IN RUTH

## How to approach studying the Bible

1. Read the text: Establish author, audience and context
2. Read the text: Identify the message being communicated
3. Identify questions that you want to have answered: Use resources to find answers.
4. Read the text: Identify the message being communicated
5. Map the audience & message: Apply the message to your life
6. Compare your conclusions with others: Trace back any differences to the text

## Setting the Context

Objective: Become familiar with the contents of the book and understand what it is trying to communicate

**Step One: Read the book and identify the author and everything they reveal about themselves.**

The author is not identified by name. Some attribute the writing to Samuel, however the end of chapter 4 goes on to talk about the life of King David – which Samuel never saw. So It must have been some scribe after Samuel lived who captured the story based on an oral history.

**Step Two: Read the book and identify the audience and everything revealed about them.**
Map the audience – how close or far are they to us today?

The audience is not specifically named. It seems reasonable to think that this book was written to the nation of Israel, as a reminder of God's goodness and redemption. It also showed how God moved to bring David to the throne.

**Supplement to Author and Audience:**

Since neither the audience nor the author are reliably identified, I plan to use the three main characters of the book to guide my interpretation and application in the Book of Ruth.

- Naomi
- Ruth
- Boaz

As such I know a few things about them:

- Boaz and Naomi were of the people of Israel.
    - Boaz was a relative of Elimelech, Naomi's late husband, possibly a cousin, but on the family tree, there was someone closer
- Ruth was from Moab (descendants of Lot, Abraham's nephew). They were foreigners but considered "family" in that intermarriage was not prohibited.
    - Ruth probably married Mahlon (likely the eldest because he was named first, and the inheritance would most likely run through him).

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- Ruth chose not to return to Moab when Naomi returned to Judah. She bound herself to Naomi and her people.
    - Ruth's dedication to Naomi was remarkable in that people in the town were talking about it and even Boaz had heard of it.
- Naomi was in a position that required redemption. She was too old to remarry and could not have any more children to provide for her.
    - Ruth always had the option to remarry. She could have done so in Moab or in Bethlehem. Doing so would have abandoned Naomi.
- When Ruth went to the fields to glean, she did not choose Boaz's field for any reason. She "chanced" to be gleaning there.
- Both Ruth and Boaz are both called "worthy"
- All three characters lived before Jesus, and so were subject to the demands of the Law in the Old Testament – they only had sacrifices to cover their sins.
- They were God-fearing people – Ruth's declaration of loyalty to Naomi makes this clear.

Further, after reading the book, it doesn't explicitly touch on specific theological matters. The ritual demands of the Law are not mentioned. This story seems to be much more focused on the idea and process of redemption.

As a western believer, this redemption process is completely foreign to me. Ruth serves an invaluable purpose to introduce me to this legal option. The entire book paints a picture of the greater redemption that I have received through Jesus.

The other main character in this story is God. God is mentioned 21 times throughout the story. So, in a way of thinking, I can see this as God's story. From His position of sovereignty, He is behind every event that happened.

Having read the entire story and understanding the focus on Redemption and the picture it paints of Jesus' sacrifice, I must assume that everything that happened in the story, happened because that's how God wanted to paint the picture. Therefore, I am operating from the fundamental assumption that "Every action is God's action."

While the individual characters exercised their own volition and choice. God superintended this story to be His ideal picture of redemption. Therefore, while we read about what Boaz, Ruth and Naomi said, this remains God's story.

For me, I consider this Naomi's story. Even though Ruth does much more activity, and the book bears her name. I consider this Naomi's story because only Naomi was utterly desperate. At any time, Ruth had the option to marry. She could have done that back in Moab. She could have done it in Bethlehem.

Naomi was the one who could only be redeemed by the Kinsman Redeemer. She was literally in the place of no choices and no way to secure her future. She is also the only person who is continuous from beginning to end.

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For these reasons, I suspect that Naomi began telling this story as a tribute to God for saving her life. From her telling, it entered the oral tradition in Bethlehem until it was later written down by a scribe who added the genealogy on the end as a way of further heightening the focus on God's sovereign plan.

**Step Three: Read the book and highlight or mark key words that jump out of the text at you.**
These could be key connecting words or words that seem important to the book (e.g. repetition, topical).

- Ruth, Naomi and Boaz are referenced throughout the entire book.
- The LORD is also mentioned a lot across the entire book.
    - In conjunction with "Blessed" enough times to mention
- Redeemer (and its derivatives) shows up in the 2nd half of the book

**Step Four: Read the book and summarize each paragraph with 1-3 key words from the paragraph.**

- 1:1-5 Prologue: Naomi left alone
- 1:6-14 Naomi releases her daughters in law
- 1:15-18 Ruth clings to Naomi
- 1:19-21 Naomi returns home
- 1:22 Summary
- 2:1-7 Boaz notices Ruth
- 2:9-13 Boaz gives Ruth permission
- 2:14-16 Boaz provides for Ruth
- 2:17-23 Ruth reports to Naomi
- 3:1-5 Naomi tells Ruth what to do
- 3:6-13 Boaz accepts Ruth's plea
- 3:14-18 Boaz gives Ruth a gift
- 4:1-6 The redeemer is unwilling
- 4:7-12 Boaz redeems Ruth and Naomi
- 4:13-17 God gives Ruth a son
- 4:18-21 Genealogy of David

**Step Five: Make a list of questions that you have based on what you've read.**
Use your resources to look up information to answer the questions.

1. Who, or what, is Ephrathah?

- [Unger's Bible Handbook] Ephrathah was an ancient name of the city of Bethlehem. Reference to Genesis 35:16. Bethlehem is a Hebrew name, from the words House (Bet) of Bread (Lechem). Bethlehem must have been called Ephrathah as an earlier Canaanite name for the same place.

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2. What was the law of redemption that Boaz spoke about?

- [ESV Study Bible] From the notes, this seems to be pointing back to Leviticus 25:23-25, 48-49. From this come several relevant points that entire chapter:
    - First. The land is God's. He owns it and people are but passing through and using it.
    - Second. All land ownership was in the context of the Year of Jubilee where any land sold reverted back to the Hebrew family, so it could not be permanently lost. Selling the land was more like leasing control of it for however many years remained until the Year of Jubilee
    - Third. If a Hebrew family was forced to sell the land outside of the family, then a redeemer could come and buy it back into the family, it was his right to purchase whether the present owner wanted to sell or not.
    - Fourth. There was a strict hierarchy of kinsmen who could become a redeemer (from nearest to farthest): brother, uncle, cousin, another close relative

3. Why did Naomi change her name (and why did no one call her Mara after)?

- [ESV Study Bible] Naomi means "pleasant" and Mara means "bitter". Naomi is illustrating her belief that God is against her and punishing her for something (see also 1:11-13). She has lost her husband, her sons and even one of her daughters in law. She has returned home to unhappy prospects and life is generally not good.

  It seems that this was a dramatic gesture on her part, and not truly accepted by the people in the community – who continued to call her Naomi.

4. Why does Boaz say that Naomi is selling her land?

- [ESV Study Bible] It is not clear that Naomi still owns or controls the land. Perhaps this is an indication that for the redeemer, the land is available for purchase now (since it is known that Elimelech and his two sons are dead, and the land needs redeeming). What is clear is that for the 2 redeemers, purchasing the land is currently on the table.

**Step Six: Write out in one sentence or a short paragraph what you <u>currently</u> understand the book to be about.**

This should be a concise version of all the information captured above:

- Author
- Audience
- Setting
- Reason for writing
- Key points made

Through the lives of Naomi, Ruth and Boaz we simultaneously see God's care and provision toward His people and a live sized picture of the process of redemption for those who are hopelessly lost.