**The Book of Ruth**

The Book of Ruth is named for the Moabite woman who commits herself to the Israelite people by an oath to her mother-in-law Naomi and becomes the great-grandmother of David by marriage to Boaz of Bethlehem.

Outline

1: 1– 5 Prologue: A Family Dies

1: 6– 22 Naomi and Ruth in Bethlehem: Emptiness and Uncertainty

2: 1– 23 Naomi, Ruth and Boaz (I): A Meeting with Possibilities

3: 1– 18 Naomi, Ruth and Boaz (II): A Husband for Ruth

4: 1– 12 The Climax: Boaz Acts

4: 13– 17 A Son for Naomi

4: 18– 22 Epilogue: A Family’s Genealogy

The book of Ruth contains a rare and delightful story that continues to captivate its audience no matter how often it is read. It is a story of love and commitment set in challenging circumstances. Few can forget the loyalty of Ruth, the bitterness of Naomi, the forthright Boaz. The story has been of special interest to Christians since Matthew lists Ruth among the ancestors of Jesus (Mt 1: 5).

The plot of the book is controlled by the problems that Ruth and Naomi have as they adjust to their new status as widows. These problems are resolved through the interaction of the book’s main characters: Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz, relieving the tension created by the uncertain future that the two women faced. The principal characters are exemplary persons whose goodness is rewarded in the end, reinforcing the belief that human events are in some sense under the control of a power that insures that good triumphs.

Ruth’s Place in the Canon While there is universal agreement about Ruth’s canonical status, there is some disagreement about the book’s place within the canon. In Christian Bibles, including the New American Bible, the book of Ruth occupies a place after Judges and before 1 Samuel, following the order of books in the Septuagint, which was the version of the Old Testament read in the early Church. No doubt the Septuagint placed Ruth after Judges because the story is set “in the time of the judges” (Ru 1: 1). It is important to note that despite its placement, the book of Ruth is not a part of the Deuteronomistic History— the story of Israel from conquest to exile found in the books of Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, and 1 and 2 Kings. It does not reflect the thought or style of the Deuteronomistic History; nor does it have Deuteronomistic theological overtones (see section on Deuteronomistic History, rg 179– 228). In the Hebrew Bible or its translation as used in the synagogue, the book of Ruth is placed in the third division of the Jewish canon: the Writings, a collection of miscellaneous works. Jewish liturgical practice includes Ruth among the five Megilloth, the scrolls that are read on major Jewish festivals. The book of Ruth is read on the Feast of Shavuʾot (Weeks), which Christians know as Pentecost.

Solomon’s fall from God’s favor is blamed in part on the Moabite women who were in his harem. Solomon even built a shrine to the Moabite god Chemosh for them (1 Kgs 11: 7, 33). Moab was a frequent object of prophetic criticism. The book of Ruth, then, stands in dramatic contrast to the hostility toward Moabites evident in the biblical tradition.

The book of Ruth presents three characters— Ruth, Boaz, and Naomi— whose actions go beyond what is required of them. Ruth makes a commitment to her mother-in-law, Naomi, which ignores the claims of religious traditions and national origins. Naomi shows her loving concern for Ruth by devising a scheme to induce Boaz to marry Ruth although that scheme could have backfired on her. Boaz ignores his self-interest to marry Ruth and redeem the property of Naomi’s husband. The story shows how people who think of others’ needs before their own find their truest happiness. God approves the conduct of these people by giving a son to Ruth and Boaz— a son who removes the emptiness and uncertainty that faced the widow Naomi.

Reference:

Donald Senior; John Collins; Mary Ann Getty. The Catholic Study Bible (p. 485). Oxford University Press. Kindle Edition.

Elimelech – husband/father

Chilion (Son) died

Mahlon (Son) died

Naomi (wife)

Ruth (Son’s wife) stayed

Orpah (Son’s wife) left

14Again they wept aloud; then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law good-bye, but Ruth clung to her.

Donald Senior; John Collins; Mary Ann Getty. The Catholic Study Bible (p. 2284). Oxford University Press. Kindle Edition.