

Ruth

God Rewards the Selfless			
Devotion Brings Food & Protection		Devotion Brings Messianic Ancestry	
Love Revealed		Love Rewarded	
Ruth and Naomi		Ruth and Boaz	
Return		Romance	
Chapters 1–2		Chapters 3–4	
Selflessness Shown	Temporal Rewards	Redemption Requested	Eternal Rewards
Return	Reward	Romance	Redeem
Death of a Family	Ruth Cares for Naomi	Boaz Cares for Ruth	Birth of a Family
Moab	Fields in Bethlehem	Threshing Floor in Bethlehem	Gate in Bethlehem
30 Years			

Key Word: Rewards

Key Verses: *Devotion:* "... Ruth replied, 'Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God'" (Ruth 1:16).

Reward: "'The LORD bless him!' Naomi said to her daughter-in-law. 'The LORD has not stopped showing kindness to the living and the dead. She added, 'That man is our close relative; he is one of our kinsman-redeemers'" (Ruth 2:20)

Summary Statement:

The way God blesses those who help others is seen in Ruth's devotion to Naomi that benefits both of them by God's provision of food, a home, and sharing in the Davidic and messianic line.

Application:

God helps those who help themselves others.

Ruth

Introduction

- I. **Title** The name Ruth (רוּת *ruth*) means "friendship" (BDB 946c) and describes the outstanding characteristic of the main person in the book—Ruth herself.

II. Authorship

- A. External Evidence: Talmudic tradition ascribes the authorship of Ruth to Samuel.
- B. Internal Evidence: Ruth makes no mention of its author. Some (e.g., *TTTB*, 66) have supposed that authorship by Samuel could not be possible since David appears in Ruth (4:17, 22) but Samuel died before David's coronation (1 Sam. 25:1). However, Samuel himself anointed David as king although he had not yet been crowned (1 Sam. 16). Since the genealogy in the book (4:18-21) stops with David and makes no mention of Solomon, the book was likely written after David's anointing but before Solomon's crowning. Since the only tradition ascribes the writing to Samuel, it was written during his lifetime, and no internal evidence proves otherwise, it is most probable that Samuel penned the narrative.

III. Circumstances

- A. Date: As noted above, since the genealogy in the book (4:18-21) stops with David and makes no mention of Solomon, the book was likely written after David's anointing (ca. 1030 BC) and, at the latest, just before Solomon's crowning as king (971 BC). However, authorship by Samuel pushes the date back to probably 1030-1020 BC.

Of course, the story itself takes place in the previous era of the judges (1:1). Since this period lasted over 300 years, at what point does the account of Ruth occur? An estimate can be discerned through the genealogy again. Since Ruth was the great-grandmother of David (4:17), who began his rule in 1010 BC, some believe Ruth lived in the latter part of the 12th century at the time of Gideon (e.g., Reed, *BKC*, 1:415-16). However, Gideon ministered in the *early* 12th century (1191-1151 BC) so the latter half of the 12th century places the marriage of Boaz and Ruth at approximately 1120 BC during the judgeship of Jair (Whitcomb, "Chart of the Old Testament Patriarchs and Judges," in these notes, 96). Therefore, Samuel records events that happened about one century earlier.

- B. Recipients: The first readers of Ruth must have been those under the unified kingdom of Saul and David, some of the older readers having experienced the tragedy of the end of the era of the judges.
- C. Occasion: Ruth takes place at the time of the judges (1:1). Samuel records the moral and spiritual failure of Israel during this time in the Book of Judges itself, which ends with two horrible accounts: the hiring of a Levite pagan priest who blesses Dan's ungodly migration (Judges 17-18), and the murder of a concubine by the Benjamites with the national retaliation that nearly destroys the tribe (Judges 19-21).

The story of Ruth serves as a third illustration of life at this time, but provides the other side of the story. "The Book of Ruth gleams like a beautiful pearl against a jet-black background" (Reed, *BKC*, 1:415). Perhaps Samuel, as author of Judges, saw the need to balance the picture of the period of the judges with godly examples (Ruth and Boaz) who lived according to the laws of God despite the unfaithfulness of the nation as a whole.

One key theme of Ruth is similar to that of Judges—God's redemption—yet in Ruth this redemption comes not through judicial or executive reforms in a deliverer, but rather through a godly couple who provide the Messianic line through their faithfulness to the covenant and to others. Ironically, the word "covenant" is never used in the book.

IV. Characteristics

- A. Ruth is only one of two books in Scripture named for women (the other is Esther). Both had mixed marriages. Esther was a Hebrew who married a Gentile; Ruth was a Gentile who married a Hebrew.
- B. The Book of Ruth contains the second highest proportion of dialogue in the canonical books, surpassed only by the Song of Songs. Of the 84 verses in the narrative, 59 have dialogue!
- C. Irony plays a significant part in the Ruth narrative (adapted from Robert Chisholm, "Theology of Ruth," Dallas Seminary Class Notes, 1985):
 1. This, the most beautiful love story in the Bible, never once uses the word "love."
 2. At the start of the story, God has *blessed* (1:6), but Naomi is *bitter* (1:20-21). However, at the end, Naomi is *blessed* (4:14ff.) even though she once wanted to be called Mara, which means bitter (1:21)!
 3. Naomi initially rules out any possibility that she could provide Ruth with *any* man for a husband (1:11-13), but soon a member of her *own* family marries Ruth (2:20; 4:13)!
 4. In 1:21 Naomi complains that she returns to Bethlehem empty (which insults the ever loyal Ruth standing beside her!), but in the final analysis, Ruth is better to her than seven (the ideal number) sons (4:15; cf. 1 Sam. 2:5)!
 5. Boaz prays for Ruth, who sought refuge under Yahweh's "wings" (2:12), and within a few months Ruth asks him to cover her with his own "corner" or "wing" (3:9 is the same Hebrew word as 2:12). He does so by marrying her and thus answers his own prayer!
- D. The Book of Ruth contrasts with Judges in several ways (*TTTB*, 68, adapted):

Judges	Ruth
Faithlessness	Faithfulness
Immorality	Fidelity, righteousness, purity
Idolatry	Following the true God
Decline, debasement, disloyalty	Devotion
Lust	Love
War	Peace
Cruelty	Kindness
Bethlehem Bad	Bethlehem Benefits
Anarchy	Monarchy
Tribal	National
Saul	David
Disobedience leads to sorrow	Obedient faith leads to blessing
Spiritual darkness	Spiritual light

The book is totally positive. "Ruth is a literary masterpiece. The author, with consummate artistry, great delicacy, obvious enjoyment, yet a bare minimum of words, has depicted people who, although magnanimous, are believable. At one level, this is what the story teaches: its characters live, love, and relate so as to be the enfleshment of the Hebrew concept of *sēdaqā* 'righteousness,' 'integrity,' illustrating in concrete terms life under God's covenant. The story has no villain. Orpah does leave her mother-in-law, but only after a second appeal, and the nearer kinsman is perfectly willing to redeem the land until his own patrimony is jeopardized by the concomitant requirement of marrying Ruth" (LaSor, 614). The only exception to the positive nature of the book is that Naomi's "triple insurance policy" of a husband and two sons falls apart in the first verses of the narrative.

E. The Book of Ruth is best understood in light of two customs in the Law of Moses:

1. The Practice of Gleaning (Deut. 24:19-22; Lev. 19:9, 10): Israel's "welfare system" required work by the poor ("workfare"). Landowners could not harvest the corners of their fields so that the poor, the aliens, the widows, and the orphans could pick up ("glean") the remaining sheaves. Ruth benefited from this merciful provision in the Law (2:2, 3, 7, 8, 15-19, 22).
2. The Kinsman-Redeemer (Deut. 25:5-10): The Law also required a dead man's brother to marry his widow and raise their first son in the name of his brother. While the Law prohibited sexual relations with a sister-in-law (Lev 18:16), this kinsman-redeemer provision was *required* when the brother died: (a) without a son (male heir) and (b) when these brothers lived together, having jointly inherited their father's property. The new husband was called the "kinsman-redeemer," or *goel* (Hebrew). If the deceased man had no living brother, then the *goel* was the closest male relative. Ruth's first husband, Mahlon (4:10), had no living brother, thus making the next closest kin responsible (3:12), but since he refused to marry Ruth (4:5-6), Boaz became the nearest kin. This emphasis on the *goel* in Ruth is clear as the kinsman-redeemer appears 13 times in only four chapters.

This kinsman-redeemer (*goel*) theme beautifully typifies Christ's relationship with the Church. Four requirements existed for a legitimate *goel*, all of which Christ fulfilled as the *goel* to redeem people:

1. He must be blood-related to those he redeems (2:20; cf. Deut. 25:5, 7-10). Jesus was God made fully man (John 1:14; Rom. 1:3; Phil. 2:5-8; Heb. 2:14-15).
2. He must be able to pay the redemption price (2:1; cf. 1 Peter 1:18-19).
3. He must be willing to redeem (3:11; cf. Matt. 20:28; John 10:15, 18; Heb. 10:7).
4. He must be free himself (4:10; cf. the virgin birth freed Christ from the curse of sin; Matt. 1:23).

F. Although most (except the first infidel below) would agree that Ruth is a beautiful story, its theme is debated. The following shows what some have suggested as the primary teaching of the book:

1. No Purpose Whatsoever: "...The book of Ruth [is] an idle, bungling story, foolishly told, nobody knows by whom, about a strolling country-girl, creeping shyly to bed with her cousin Boaz. Pretty stuff indeed, to be called the Word of God! It is, however, one of the best books of the Bible, for it is free from murder and rapine" (Thomas Paine, *The Age of Reason*).
2. Affirmation of King David's rights to the throne of Israel (John Reed, *BKC*, 1:418). This includes identifying David with the unconditional Abrahamic Covenant in his priestly role in the order of Melchizedek (cf. 1 Chron. 15-17; Pss. 2, 110) rather than the conditional Mosaic Covenant (Thomas L. Constable, "A Theology of Joshua, Ruth, and Judges," in *A Biblical Theology of the OT*, ed. Roy B. Zuck, 96). Thus, David functioned as king (whose genealogy stretched back to Judah—Ruth 4:18; Gen. 49:10) and priest.
3. God's faithful, providential workings: "The Lord is faithful in his business of loving, superintending, and providentially caring for his people" (Reed, *BKC*, 418); cf. "God is at work in the 'corners of the land' though violence may fill the news" (Wiersbe, *Expository Outlines on the OT*, 131); Ruth focuses "on God's providential activity in the lives of the participants" (LaSor, 614); "God watches over his people and brings blessing to those who trust Him" (Morris, 242); Ronald Hals, *The Theology of the Book of Ruth*, Facet Books Biblical Series 23 [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969], 18).
4. "Since God's people are recipients of his grace they, like Ruth and Boaz, should respond in faithful obedience to him and in gracious acts towards other people" (Reed, *BKC*, 1:418)

5. Redemption/Kinsman-Redeemer: The illustration of grace by redeeming others (*TTTB*, 67; cf. Reed, *BKC*, 418) is a type of Christ's redemptive role.
6. "Put Your Life Together" (title of Warren Wiersbe's book).
7. "Men, watch out for those women; they'll get you yet" (H. Gunkel).
8. Marriage to foreigners is OK: Ruth defends against the exclusivism and nationalism shown in the forced divorcing of pagan wives by Ezra and Nehemiah (Abraham Geiger in 1857, followed by Bertholet, Rost, Weiser). [But Ruth became an Israelite!]
9. Entertainment (R. H. Pfeiffer, *Intro. to OT*, [New York: Harper, 1941], 719)
10. Several other purposes: friendship, faithfulness, kinsman-redeemer, don't exclude Moabites, why David took his parents to Moab (cf. F. B. Huey, "Ruth," *EBC*, 3:512)
11. God blesses those who help others: "As a just king Yahweh [God] (1) **provides** for the needs of widows/resident aliens... and (2) **blesses** (fertility, family continuity, great descendant) those who demonstrate loyalty/devotion (*hesed*) in their relationships to others (cf. Ps. 18:25)" (Robert Chisholm, DTS Notes; Judah J. Slotki, "Ruth" in *The Soncino Books of the Bible: The Five Megilloth*, ed. A. Cohen [London: Soncino, 1946], 38).

Of the many options above, the last description of the book's purpose seems to have the most to recommend it, as shown in the following argument and outline.

Argument

The Book of Ruth chronicles the devotion of Ruth, a young Moabitess widow, to Naomi, her widowed mother-in-law. It shows how God blesses those who help others, which is especially significant since the story takes place in the most selfish period of Israel's history—the time of the judges—when "every man did what was right in his own eyes" (Jud. 21:25). The LORD blesses Ruth's devotion to Naomi first only through provision of temporal needs such as food and protection (Ruth 1–2), but the account ends climactically with Ruth's reward of a home and especially participation in the Davidic and messianic line (Ruth 3–4). Therefore, the Book of Ruth is a strong apologetic for the benefits of selfless and righteous living during the most selfish and unrighteous period of Israel's history. The final word of the book is "David." This catches the reader by surprise to realize that the entire preceding story was about David's great-grandparents!

Synthesis

God rewards the selfless

1–2		Devotion brings food and protection
1		Selflessness shown
	1:1-5	Setting
	1:6-18	Ruth's Devotion
	1:19-22	Naomi's Bitterness
2		Temporal rewards
	2:1-3	God's guidance
	2:4-16	Food/protection
	2:17-23	Hope for redemption
3–4		Devotion brings messianic ancestry
3		Redemption requested
	3:1-5	Naomi instructs
	3:6-9	Ruth proposes
	3:10-15	Boaz accepts
	3:16-18	Ladies anticipate
4		Eternal rewards
	4:1-13a	Marriage/finances
	4:13b	Son
	4:14-17	Renewed Naomi
	4:18-21	Davidic/Messianic line

Outline

Summary Statement for the Book

The way God blesses those who help others is seen in Ruth's devotion to Naomi that benefits both of them by God's provision of food, a home, and sharing in the Davidic and messianic line.

- I. The way God blessed Ruth's devotion to Naomi by providing food and protection shows how God blesses those who help others (Ruth 1–2).**
 - A. Ruth's devotion to her mother-in-law, Naomi, led her to leave family and country to return to Bethlehem, which exemplified selfless sacrifice for others and God (Ruth 1).
 1. Ruth and Naomi became widows after their husbands, Mahlon (Naomi and Elimelech's son) and Elimelech, died while the family lived in Moab to escape Bethlehem's famine (1:1-5).
 2. Ruth's devotion to Naomi by leaving family and country to travel with her to Bethlehem exemplified selfless sacrifice for others and God (1:6-18).
 - a) When Naomi returned to Bethlehem, her daughter-in-law Orpah (Moabite: "stubbornness") stayed in Moab to pursue a selfish, pagan, idolatrous lifestyle (1:6-14).
 - b) Unlike Orpah, Ruth (Heb: "friendship") left her family, country, and idolatry by returning to Bethlehem with Naomi in her selfless commitment to others and God (1:15-18).
 3. Naomi (Heb: "pleasant"), bitter against God by wanting the name Mara (Heb: "bitterness"), could not see God's provision of Ruth to show an inadequate response to trials (1:19-22).
 - B. Ruth's devotion to Naomi by working for her benefited them both, as God provided food, protection, and hope for future redemption, showing how God blesses the selfless (Ruth 2).
 1. God guided Ruth to the field of her kinsman-redeemer, Boaz, due to her initiative to work for Naomi to show his pleasure with those who sacrifice for others (2:1-3).
 2. Boaz rewarded Ruth's gleaning for Naomi when he protected her and provided food for her as God's blessing for her kindness to Naomi (2:4-16).
 3. Ruth shared her blessing of food with Naomi and saw Boaz as a potential kinsman-redeemer, filling Naomi with gratitude and hope for future redemption (2:17-23).
- II. The way God blessed Ruth's devotion to Naomi through Boaz beyond her dreams with a home in the Davidic and Messianic lines shows that God blesses the selfless (Ruth 3–4).**
 - A. Ruth's request for redemption by Boaz shows her devotion to Naomi, and his accepting her proposal shows his righteous response to his duty and how God blesses Ruth's faith (Ruth 3).
 1. Naomi requested Ruth to follow her plan for her redemption, and Ruth agreed to follow the plan entirely, thus again showing her devotion to her mother-in-law (3:1-5).
 2. Ruth's request for redemption by Boaz showed her devotion to Naomi since, without remarriage, she had no long-term way to support herself and Naomi (3:6-9).
 3. Boaz gladly accepted Ruth's proposal contingent on the nearer kinsman's refusal to show his righteous response to his obligation and God's blessing upon Ruth's faith (3:10-15).
 4. Naomi and Ruth expected Ruth's redemption by the nearer kinsman or Boaz that day (3:16-18).
 - B. Ruth's redemption by Boaz for her devotion to Naomi exceeded her dreams in her relationships and sharing in Davidic and messianic line to show how God blesses the selfless (Ruth 4).
 1. Ruth's reward of marriage and financial security for her devotion to Naomi occurred as the nearer kinsman refused his right to redemption and Boaz married Ruth (4:1-13a).

2. The birth of Ruth's son Obed rewarded her devotion to Naomi (4:13b).
3. A renewed Naomi rewarded Ruth for her devotion to Naomi (4:14-17)!
4. Participation in the Davidic and messianic line became Ruth's greatest reward for her devotion to Naomi, to show how God blesses those who help others (4:18-22).

Geography of Ruth

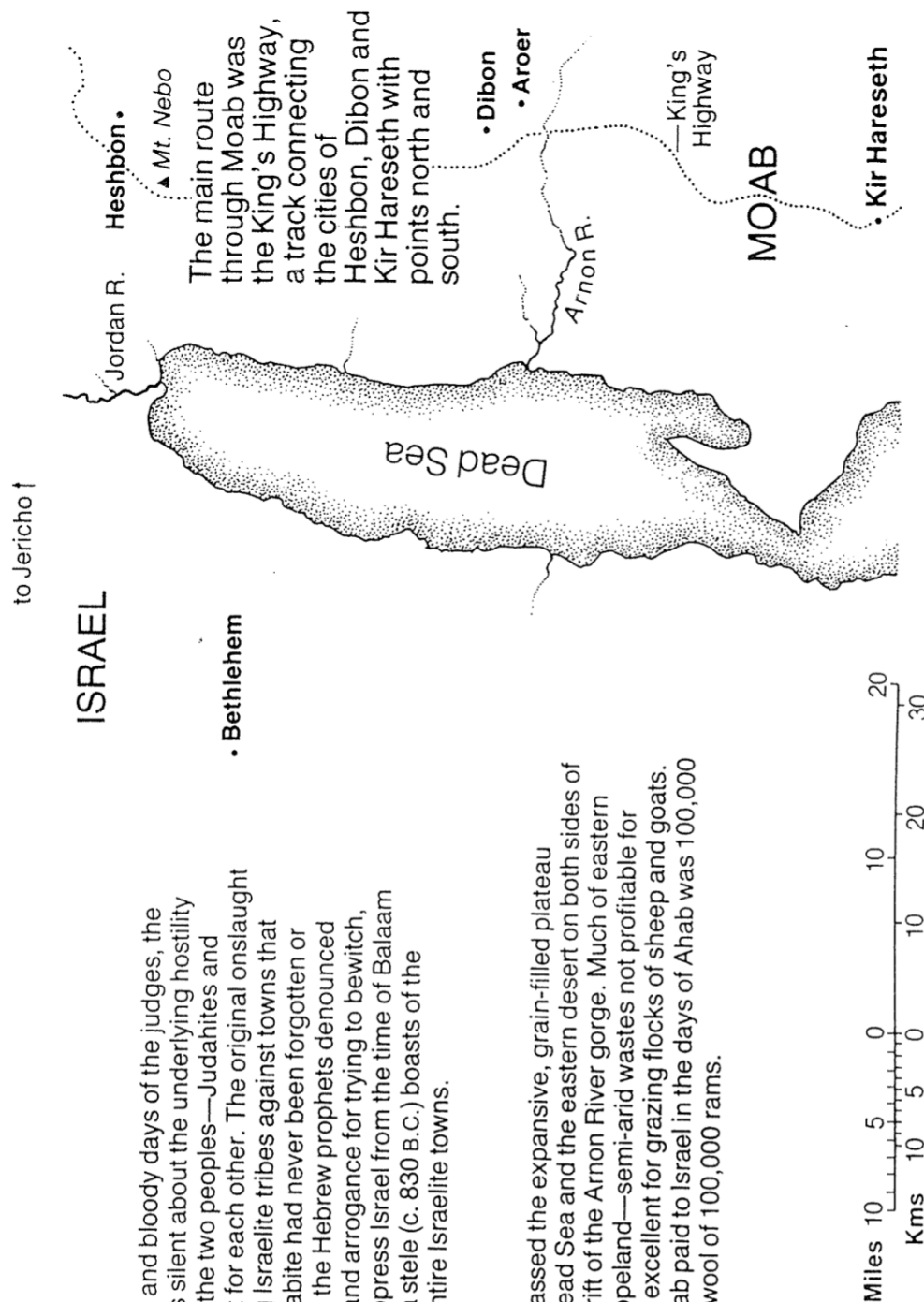
The Bible Visual Resource Book, 53

Ruth

The Book of Ruth

Set in the dark and bloody days of the judges, the story of Ruth is silent about the underlying hostility and suspicion the two peoples—Judahites and Moabites—felt for each other. The original onslaught of the invading Israelite tribes against towns that were once Moabite had never been forgotten or forgiven, while the Hebrew prophets denounced Moab's pride and arrogance for trying to bewitch, seduce and oppress Israel from the time of Balaam on. The Mesha stele (c. 830 B.C.) boasts of the massacre of entire Israelite towns.

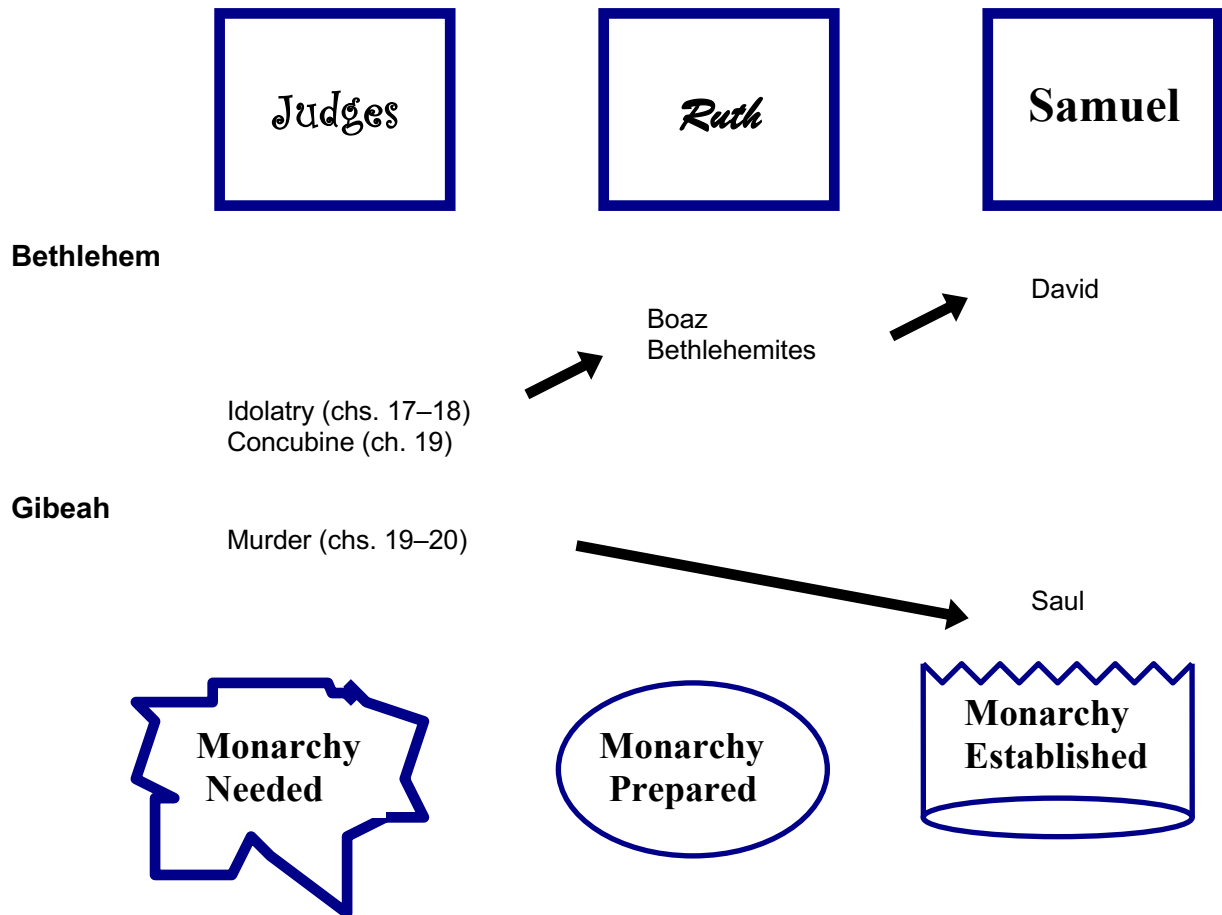
Moab encompassed the expansive, grain-filled plateau between the Dead Sea and the eastern desert on both sides of the enormous rift of the Arnon River gorge. Much of eastern Moab was steppeland—semi-arid wastes not profitable for cultivation, but excellent for grazing flocks of sheep and goats. The tribute Moab paid to Israel in the days of Ahab was 100,000 lambs and the wool of 100,000 rams.



Theology of Ruth

Adapted from Thomas L. Constable, "A Theology of Joshua, Ruth, and Judges," in *A Biblical Theology of the OT*, ed. Roy B. Zuck, 95-96, 117

The book of Ruth is a hinge between Judges and Samuel, theologically speaking. This is especially true in the contrast between how Bethlehem and Gibeah are presented:



The rise of David and the demise of Saul appear as parallel themes from the books of Judges to Samuel. This is evident in the depictions of their cities of origin.

Bethlehem, the city of David, begins poorly in two incidents of false worship and sensuality. A Levite from Bethlehem begins employment as a pagan priest (Jud. 17–18), and a concubine from Bethlehem becomes abused by the men of Gibeah (Jud. 19). However, the town becomes virtuous in Ruth, where both Boaz and the people show themselves true worshippers of God. The climax in 1 Samuel 16 shows David, the ideal king, pure in sensual desires and worship of the Lord.

Gibeah, the hometown of Saul (1 Sam. 10:26), provides a stark contrast. This Benjamite city also begins poorly by murdering the Bethlehemite concubine (Jud. 19). This incurs the wrath of the other tribes on all Benjamites, nearly eradicating the tribe (Jud. 20). Things even get worse. In Samuel, this degenerates to Saul's mad attempt to murder God's chosen king (from Bethlehem).

Therefore, Ruth is the pivot book between the others, indicating the rise of Bethlehem (David) while the lack of mention of Gibeah downplays the role of the Benjamites and Saul in God's plan.