

Book of Ruth

Quick FAQ:

- The Book of Ruth – is the fifth book in the Ketuvim (Writings) section of the Tanakh.
- According to the rabbis it is Samuel who wrote the Book of Ruth (Bava Batra 14b).
- The figure of Ruth is celebrated as a righteous convert to Judaism.
- The Book of Ruth is also a megillah, which is traditionally read during the festival of Shavuot as an honor to King David – Ruth’s descendent.

The Book of Ruth can be divided into four sections:

1. Prologue and Problem (Chapter 1)
2. Ruth meets Boaz (Chapter 2)
3. Naomi sends Ruth to Boaz (Chapter 3)
4. Resolution and Epilogue (Chapter 4)

The Story

Prologue and Problem (Chapter 1)

Elimelekh and his family were among the nobility of Beit-lechem who fled to Moav.

Why according to some interpreters did Elimelekh and his family flee to Moav?

The two sons – Machlon and Kilyon – married two Moabite women by the names of Orpah and Ruth. The husbands died along with the father after being in Moav for ten years. Upon the deaths of her husband and sons Naomi and her two daughter-in-laws rose to return to the land of Judah.

Naomi gave both women a parting kiss but each woman remained determined to go to Judah with Naomi.

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Upon hearing of the coming hardships Orpah gave a parting kiss to Naomi and returned to her family.

According to tradition, who was Orpah's descendent?

Ruth however declared that she would stay with Naomi through every hardship and she will become a member of the Israelites and worship Hashem only.

According to Karaite teachings, Ruth made a vow to Hashem to only worship Hashem and to follow Torah and thereupon she converted. This is still the practice for converts to Karaite Judaism.

Naomi permitted Ruth to accompany her back to Judah and Naomi and Ruth began to subsist upon the gleanings of the harvest for they were a gift from Hashem for the poor. Since Ruth converted to the Yisraelite faith Naomi permitted her to return to Judah. But, how can a Moavi convert if the Moavi are not permitted to do so?

Ruth meets Boaz (Chapter 2)

Naomi's in-law was Boaz.

According to Rashi and the sages, Boaz is Ivzan of Beit-lechem who is the judge mentioned in the Book of Judges (chapter 12).

Ruth insisted upon gleaning for herself and for Naomi.

What is this gleaning all about? Why is Ruth and Naomi permitted to glean in someone else's field?

Boaz arrived at the field and greeted those who were working and inquires about Ruth. Boaz went to Ruth and instructed her to stay in the field where she would be protected and not harassed for the overseer trusts her.

Boaz invited Ruth to sit and eat with him and the harvesters where she was able to eat her fill.

Boaz told his men to not harass Ruth and to also deliberately leave behind extra sheaves for her to glean for he wanted to ensure that she was well taken care of and could glean

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what she needed. Naomi praised Hashem for He had sent Ruth to the field of Naomi's relation.

Naomi sends Ruth to Boaz (Chapter 3)

Chapter 3: As the end of the harvest neared Naomi decided that it was important for Ruth to search for a husband who could take care of her. Ruth was instructed to remove the cover from the feet of Boaz (and thus uncovering his shoes) to remind him that he had the obligation of marriage since he is the closest relative to Naomi – and by extension – to Ruth.

Why does Ruth expose Boaz's shoes as a reminder?

Boaz is startled awake in the night and asks Ruth why she is near him. Boaz praises Ruth for her loyalty and kindness to Naomi. Boaz had Ruth leave early so her reputation would not be tarnished.

Resolution and Epilogue (Chapter 4)

Chapter 4: Boaz went to the gate where the nearer redeeming relative passed by. Boaz called together a minyan – ten men – to witness the exchange between himself and the relative.

We see in the Hebrew that this relative is referred to as Piloni Almoni (בִּיְלֹמֵאֵל בְּפֶלֶא) which is equivalent to "John Doe." Why is he referred to as Piloni Almoni when we know his name from Zechariah 6:10 and II Samuel II 10:6?

The relative did not agree to redeem the land and marry Ruth out of fear for his own inheritance.

Why does marrying Ruth put the relative in fear of his own inheritance?

Boaz declared that as of that day he did redeem Naomi's land and also acquired Ruth as his wife in order to perpetuate the deceased Machlon. Boaz married Ruth and she bore

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him a son named Oved who would go on to become the father of Jesse who would become the father of David.

1Epstein, I. Soncino Babylonian Talmud. (London: Soncino Press, 1949).

[http://halakhah.com/pdf/nezikin/Baba_Bathra.pdf]

2“Mother of Royalty.” chabad.org. Chabad, n.d.

[http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/2052/jewish/Mother-of-Royalty.htm]

3Kaplan, Aryeh. The Living Nach: Sacred Writings. (New York: Moznaim Publishing Corporation, 1998).