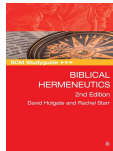


Ruth

Bible Month 2020



Rachel Starr

The Queen's Foundation
for Ecumenical Theological Education
Birmingham



*Peace and justice shall kiss
On the road with Ruth*

What kind of story is this?

This is (not) a ...

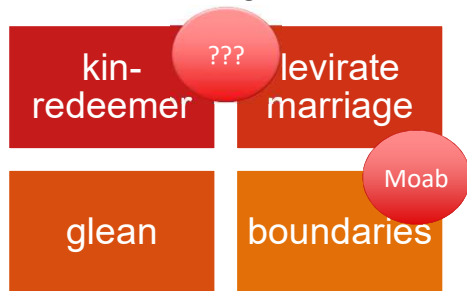
- simple story (multi-layered)
- serious story (comedic; carnivalesque)
- safe story (violence)
- love story (marriage as means of survival)

Seeking peace in times of violence
Seeing justice in broken places

Ruth takes place in the gap:
'In the days when the judges ruled... David'



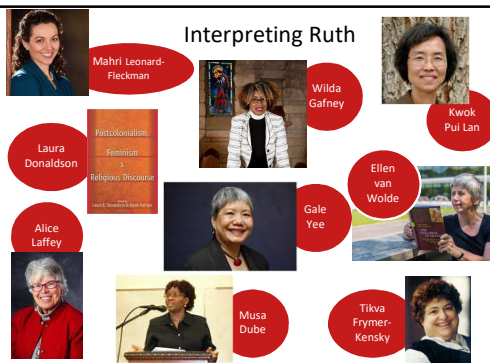
Celebrating Torah



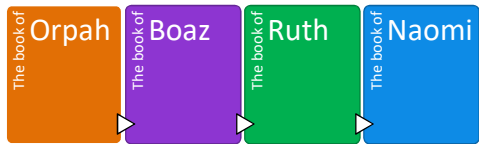
Finding Ruth a home

Leviticus	Deuteronomy	Judges	Samuel
Esther	Proverbs	Song of Songs	Job
Jonah	Genesis	Matthew	James

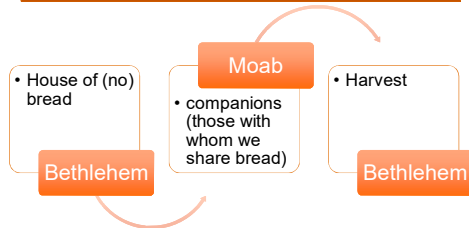
Interpreting Ruth



Whose story is this?



The Book of Orpah



The Book of Orpah

1.1 In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land, and a certain man of Bethlehem in Judah went to live in the country of Moab, he and his wife and two sons.

Elimelech
Naomi
Mahlon
Chilion
Orpah
Ruth

The Book of Orpah

1.1 In the day when
Judah came from
the country of Moab,
he and his wife and
two sons.

Elimelech
Naomi
Moses
Chloe
Orpah
Ruth



Her Or, Ruth and Naomi

The Unpublished Letters from Orpah to Ruth

'I often wonder what became of you and Naomi in Bethlehem. Sometimes I wish I could see you..
[my] daughter was named Ruth, after you. For, in this land, you shall never be forgotten..
When you have borne children, you should tell them ..stories of the Moabites; of their origins, of their kindness, of their hospitality and of their struggles for survival.
These are the true words of Orpah, your eldest Moabite Sister, the one who returned to her mother's house and to her Gods.'

(Musa Dube, 1999, p. 150)



The Book of Orpah

^{16b} 'Do not press me to leave you
or to turn back from following
you!

Where you go, I will go;
where you lodge, I will lodge;
your people shall be my people,
and your God my God.

¹⁷ Where you die, I will die—
there will I be buried.
May YHWH do thus and so to me,
and more as well,
if even death parts me from you!

- Vow of loyalty
- Pledge of love
- Contract of survival



Sandy Freckleton Gagan, Whither thou goest

The Book of Boaz

- Gleaning for the poor and stranger
 - Living off what is left behind
- Agricultural seasonal work:
 - hard physical work
 - unstable
 - poor conditions
 - vital





bread-love

God hungers for
justice, for bread
and love for all

God who is bread-
love (Elsa Tamez)

*Boaz enacting
blessings*



Eric Ravilious, Woodcut

The Book of Boaz

Boaz and Naomi set boundaries for
Ruth:

- Stay with the other young women
- Do not go into unknown fields
- Young men are warned 'do not bother (assault)'

*But whose behaviour needs to
change?*

*What might Ruth have to
teach us about seeking
justice for ourselves and
others?*

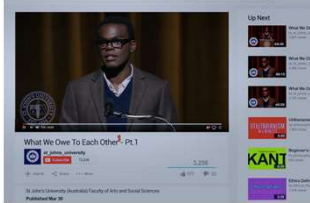
The Book of Boaz

Although God is the redeemer *par excellence*, to redeem is first and foremost a practical task: the responsibility to restore what is at risk of being lost, whether relatives facing debt and slavery, or family land about to be sold (Leviticus 25.25–55). The Hebrew word *go'el*, translated in the NRSV as nearest or next-of-kin, but more fully meaning, the one with the right (and responsibility) to redeem, is used more intensively in Ruth than in any other biblical text. Although Boaz turns out not to be the closest next-of-kin, it is he who redeems the land at risk of being lost; and it is Obed (the yet-born child) who redeems Naomi from being forgotten (4.17).



What we owe to each other
redemption and restoration
in Ruth

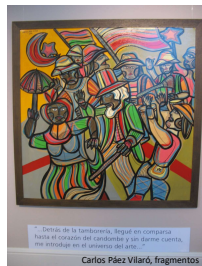
- What do Ruth, Naomi and Boaz owe to each other?
- How does the book of Ruth help us pay attention to our commitments?
- What space is there for going beyond what is owed?



The Book of Ruth

- Revelry, mockery and defiance throughout
- Comic folk tale (survival of the poor) contrast ponderous debate over legal codes
- Both rich and poor: drink, eat, sleep (on the floor) have sex
- Chaos: overturning order, boundary crossing

(Nehama Aschkenasy 2007)



The Book of Ruth

- Seeking rest – at what cost?
- Ruth and Esther: bathe, anoint, adorn
- Not naming what is clear – even in the dark

What might the book of Ruth help us to speak of?



Marc Chagall,
Ruth at the feet of Boaz

The Book of Ruth

If Ruth is primarily a story about food, about being empty or satisfied, that Boaz lies down 'at the end of the heap of grain' should not be overlooked. Perhaps it is the grain that Ruth wants to be close to, rather than Boaz.



Rembrandt: Boaz pouring six measures of barley into Ruth's veil

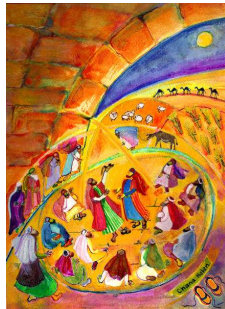
The Book of Ruth

Who are you?

1. Boaz asks his servant: 'To whom does this young woman belong?'
 - a Moabite from Moab
2. Boaz asks the woman: 'Who are you?'
 - Such a bold woman!
 - To me? Friend or foe?
3. Naomi asks Ruth: 'Who are you?'
 - Are you now Boaz's betrothed?
 - Will you still cling to me?

The Book of Naomi

- Who is invited to sit down to make decisions?
- How might other voices be heard?
- Land prized more than Ruth (barter)



Chana Helen Rosenberg: The Sandal Ceremony

A trickster family tree

Rahab at the gate (wall)

Rachel and Leah

Perez (and Zerah)

Tamar and Judah

Wife of Uriah
(Bathsheba)

Mary

The Book of Naomi

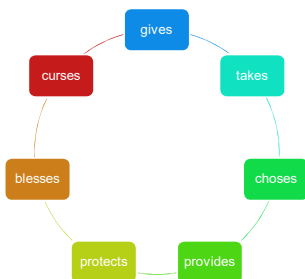


Chana Helen Rosenberg, Naomi and Oved

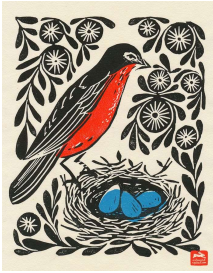
Both Ruth and Job end with a reversal of loss. But can loss be so easily overcome?

How might we embrace the breach in our own communities, celebrating the complexity of ourselves and the other?

Who is God in Ruth?



Where is God in Ruth?



Andrea Lauren

Only present twice (1.6; 4.13)

- Invoked or talked about more
- Like Esther and story of Tamar - what is striking is lack of action by God and need for the women to secure their own salvation



Barry

hesed:
steadfast
love
loving
kindness

Reading Ruth for ourselves

