

1:1-5

Now it came to pass, in the days when the judges ruled, the writer of this book assumes that the reader has read the book of Judges¹ (the chart to the right assumes no overlap—perhaps wrongly—in their administrations).² The peace procured in Judges 3:30 is probably that in which the book of Ruth transpires. **that there was a famine in the land.** Leviticus 26:18-22 prepares the reader for a feeling of doom to set over the main characters of our story. Perhaps the town in focus is under the wrath of God? We know we need a hero when there's no bread in the cabinet (verse 1), or fruit in the basket (verse 5).

And a certain man of Bethlehem, When comparing Judges 12 and Judges 19, you see there are two towns by this name, and one of them is not in **Judah**, When you see that Judges-1 Samuel is a drama between the house of Judah and the house of Benjamin, and you see that Ruth fits into the book of Judges, we see why the author (probably Samuel) is so interested in pointing out the lineage of “Elimelech.” Incidentally, the drama of Judges 19 may be the occasion of this famine.³ Oddly enough, Genesis 19 (discussed under 1:3) and Judges 19 have almost identical stories.

Bethlehem Judah is found only in Judges, Ruth, and 1 Samuel 17:12. This leads us to believe the same author penned these three books (at least that far into 1 Samuel). Judges provides the backdrop needed for the reader of 1 Samuel 17:12 while Ruth provides the genealogical information needed beginning in 1 Samuel 17:12. In other words, we don't “need” either book

Event	Duration	Judges Reference
Servitude under Mesopotamian King	8 years	3:8
Rest under Othniel	40 years (48)	3:11
Servitude under Moab	18 years (66)	3:14
Rest under Ehud	80 years (146)	3:30
Servitude under Canaanites	20 years (166)	4:3
Rest under Deborah & Barak	40 years (206)	5:31
Servitude under Midianites	7 years (213)	6:1
Rest under Gideon	40 years (253)	8:28
Under Gideon's son	3 years (256)	9:22
Under Tola	23 years (279)	10:2
Under Jair	22 years (301)	10:3
Servitude under Philistines	18 years (319)	10:8
Rest under Jephthah	6 years (325)	12:7
Under Izban	7 years (332)	12:9
Under Elon	10 years (342)	12:11
Under Abdon	8 years (350)	12:14
Servitude under Philistines	40 years (390)	13:1

¹Chapters 1-2 are basically an introduction; chapters 3-13 are a basic chronology of several judges; The reason I don't have Samson listed is because he never really gave rest to Israel but rather served as a sort of nuisance to the Philistines (on the bottom line of the chart).

Chapters 14-16 (Samson the nuisance) serves as the 3rd section while chapters 17-21 are the 4th section in the book out of which develops political intrigue (beginning, sadly, with men from Benjamin wanting to sodomize a man of Bethlehem-Judah) between the houses of Benjamin and Judah (2 of the 12 tribes of Israel, and seeming to say to the readers “which tribe should you trust?”). This continues through 2nd Samuel until the death of Saul's son, Ishbosheth (name means “man of Bosheth” and he is from the house of Benjamin), abdicates (sort of) to David (house of Judah). This lets us know, then, that the writer of Judges and Ruth, and at least the first few chapters of 2 Samuel (having been part of the book of 1 Samuel at one time) is probably the same man since the Benjamin/Judah drama is a major theme throughout.

Incidentally, by the time David becomes king of both sections of Israel at age 37, there has been about 20 years of feuding between these houses of Benjamin (Saul's family) and Judah (David). The last verse of Judges suggests that Judges was written after, at least, the beginning of Saul's reign. The Judges, then, gives us the bridge between the Conquest under Joshua and the Kings under Saul.

²When you realize we don't have room in the timeline for 390 years of judges [given the secular date for 966 for the building of Solomon's temple and the numerical peculiarities 1 Kings 6:1 provides (480 years since the Exodus giving us 1446 for the Exodus, 40 years for a wandering; 40 years for Saul's reign; 40 years for David's reign, we see we already have only 360 years remaining and we haven't even discussed the years of conquest under Joshua)], we probably should assume there are many overlaps. Judges then, occurs after conquest and before the first king, Saul. Really, since we don't see Eli or Samuel, it precedes them as well.

³We know for sure it was after Judges 3:30. Probably, Judges 17-21 occurred during this peace and prompted the famine.

until we explain how “David got here” (beginning, really, in the account of Jericho in Joshua 2:1 since Rahab is in Ruth chapter four’s genealogy).⁴

Meanwhile,

2 The name of the man was Elimelech, means the “Lord is My King.” **the name of his wife was Naomi**, means “pleasant.” **and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion—Ephrathites of Bethlehem**, Genesis 35 and Genesis 48 give both names for this town **Bethlehem Ephratah** (as does Micah 5:2). Any time you see that prefix **Beth** in the Hebrew, it means “house.” **Bethlehem** is “house of bread.” The house of bread, then, had no bread (verse 1).

Genesis 35:16-20 is the first time we find this town in the Scripture and the event is the birth of Jacob’s 12th (of 12) sons and the death of his favorite wife Rachel. **Judah. And they went to the country of Moab and remained there.**

3 Then Elimelech, Naomi’s husband, died; Amos 7 tells us this was a curse on top of the curse of famine: dying in foreign land. **and she was left, and her two sons. 4 Now they took wives of the women of Moab:** Genesis 19 tells us the origin of the **Moabites**. They are the result of an incestual relationship between Lot (Abraham’s nephew) and one of his daughters. This, by the way, indicates that they are descendants of Abraham’s father, and so these are cousins. Genesis 36 provides for us the first time that **Moab** is a location. Basically it is what we now call the nation of “Jordan.” This is also the place where Moses died. Judges 3:30, moreover, ends the story about the **Moabite** king Eglon who was killed by the left-handed judge.

the name of the one was Orpah, means “neck.” **and the name of the other Ruth.** Means “refresher.” As **Moabites** in Deuteronomy 23:1-3, they are not allowed to be a part of the “congregation of the Lord.” That is to say, that they were probably never allowed to worship around the tabernacle in Shiloh.

And they dwelt there about ten years. 5 Then both Mahlon and Chilion also died; famine, dying in a foreign land, and now two sons dying childless [after ten years of marriage (verse 4)]: thrice cursed. **so the woman survived her two sons and her husband.**

1:6-10

Then she arose with her daughters-in-law that she might return from the country of Moab, while four times seeking to turn Ruth back (verses 8, 10, 12, 15) **for she had heard in the country of Moab** It could be, when considering Numbers 22-24 (24:17 specifically), that they had some knowledge of the God of Israel, and perhaps did some talking. We could probably follow this long story through the wise men of Matthew 2. This is dealt with a little more in my commentary on Matthew (chapter 2) and my commentary on Revelation (2:14). This is, then, the second time that we know of where God “reaches the heathen.”⁵ We don’t have a God Who is uninterested in reaching the world. It has always been His will to reach them...even if it is through a “bitter” woman (1:20).

⁴Don’t forget, Judges was constantly telling us “there was no king in Israel” implying that though it bridges the “conquest” with the “kings” in its content, it was written during the time of the kings—specifically somebody wishing to establish David as the first king of the rightful tribe.

⁵Specifically, Moab in both places.

that the LORD had visited His people by giving them bread. Which is really good since the name of the town Naomi is from is the “house of **bread.**”

1:11-13

We are reminded to say here that which may be taken for granted.⁶ We are being prepared for a custom prescribed in Deuteronomy 25:5-10. What we will read later in the book will make little sense to us without this background. Ruth here seems to be trying to tell Naomi that she had nothing left to give her. She really did have nothing left for the one(s) who wished to follow. She was spent on so many levels and she was ready to return and be counted a failure.

1:15

If Naomi has the most faith of Bethlehem, no wonder there is a famine.

1:16-17

But Ruth said: so begins the closest thing I can find in Scripture to a wedding vow. I use it as such in weddings that I officiate.

Your people *shall be* my people, And your God, my God.

Ruth stood between a rock and a hard place. Would she choose her own people the Moabites and their god Chemosh with whom she was no doubt familiar, or would she cast her lot with her mother-in-law and her alien kinsmen, and their God Yahweh, whom she knew only through the grid of Naomi’s imperfect faith?⁷

Piper even reminds us that she is here making a commitment that she won’t even go home, promising to be “buried” beside her mother in law.⁸ This is a wholesale forsaking of everything she knew.

1:19

Now the two of them went until they came to Bethlehem. And it happened, when they had come to Bethlehem, that all the city was excited Joshua 15 does not mention it and would lead one to believe it is significantly smaller than the one in Zebulun (Joshua 19). Around 200-300 years later, maybe the population was larger? It’s hard to know because we don’t know how many had left because of the famine. After the exile, we have as many as 123-148 households in Ezra-Nehemiah. Again, this is 700-800 years later, but it does tell us we probably never exceeded “hundreds” as the population of this town. Furthermore, Micah 5:2 speaks of this town’s comparable insignificance.⁹

What also made this return obvious to **all the city** was that folks were working at the edge of town (1:22).

⁶John Piper *A Sweet & Bitter Providence* (Wheaton Ill: Crossway, 2010), 33.

⁷Daniel Isaac Block, Judges, Ruth, vol. 6, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 639-640.

⁸Piper, 35.

⁹My good friend Greg Majewski did this research and capsulated this opinion. It was my privilege to be his pastor for several years. He does a good job of talking about his town of Pulaski, WI—a town of 2000-3000—where everybody knew everything happening (especially those who are new to town, or have returned).

1:20-21

But she said to them, “Do not call me Naomi; the shame that comes with returning home. This really reminds this pastor that I should probably not get too eager about removing folks from membership of my church. Here is **Naomi**, already ashamed, wondering if she’ll be loved or hated when she gets home. Perhaps she was wondering who would be the first to chastise her for checking out another place to find bread.

call me Mara, and that **bitterness** was caused by a reliance upon moving and marriage and unfulfilled hopes of maternity. May we also remember that misplaced trust will disappoint us every time. **for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me.** So her name means “bitter.” Hannah is another woman who was in “**bitterness of soul**” (1 Samuel 1:9). It’s helpful to a Christian soul to know **bitterness** is not mutually exclusive from being filled with the Spirit.

21 I went out full, and the LORD There is no argument from the author here or at the end of this verse. It appears to be as true here as it was with Job or the Psalmist. So while her perspective of who is behind (maybe she had learned from the story of Joseph)¹⁰ it is correct, the reasoning of what He is doing is not.

has brought me home again empty. This seems reminiscent of Job’s response in Job 1 (see my commentary on Job).

By the way, Naomi did not go **out full**. It was a famine! Neither did not come home **empty**. She returned with Ruth. Perspective makes us forget how bad it really was and how good it really is. This is much like the Children of Israel (Numbers 11:5) when things went a little sour in their current situation.

1:22

So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabitess her daughter-in-law with her, who returned from the country of Moab. Now they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest. 4:3 seems to show us that Naomi had fields (belonging to her late husband?). Was anybody leasing this from her? Was anything growing on it? This would have been around April.¹¹

2:1-2

There was a relative of Naomi’s husband, a man of great wealth, Other places have this translated as “mighty man of valor.” Both are probably correct translations, but the context here requires that we make much of his “stature in money” rather than “stature in war.” Gideon and Jephthae are found described thusly in the book of Judges. **Boaz** is in good company.

of the family of Elimelech. His name was Boaz. Now, we realize that neither Naomi nor Ruth are the heroes of this story. Here comes the man. It’s a good thing since he’s a picture of Jesus. What a beautiful realization that you can come with barrenness, brokenness, and bitterness, and after all the restoration...you have no pressure to be the hero of the story. This is the same stage setting as that which was given to Jesus’ arrival (Mark 1:9).

¹⁰Piper, 29.

¹¹ Daniel Isaac Block, Judges, Ruth, vol. 6, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 650.

2:2

So Ruth the Moabitess said to Naomi, “Please let me go to the field, this is the same word translated “country” in 1:1 and “land” in 4:3. Yes, the same Hebrew word can be translated three different ways based on the context. **and glean heads of grain after *him* in whose sight I may find favor.”** God’s “socialism”¹² is spelled out in Leviticus 19:9, Leviticus 23:22, and Deuteronomy 24:19 when He commanded His people to not glean the corners of their fields. This is why Jesus had no issues allowing His disciples to pick food while wandering through fields (Matthew 12; Mark 2:23).

And she said to her, “Go, my daughter.”

2:3

Then she left, and went and gleaned in the field after the reapers. And she happened her “stroke of luck” was to land on the “land” which **happens** to be **the part belonging to Boaz,** Why didn’t she go to Naomi’s **field?** Maybe nobody grew anything on **Elimelech’s** (Naomi’s) field. Even if there were anything on that **field,** it seems as though it would be dangerous to go to that land (2:9).

who was of the family of Elimelech. This reminds us of Jesus, Hebrews 2:14-16, who needed to be made like unto His brothers. He had to be **family** to redeem His people, just like **Boaz.**

2:4

Now behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem, the fields, then, were outside of town. **and said to the reapers, “The LORD *be* with you!” And they answered him, “The LORD bless you!”**

2:5

Then Boaz said to his servant who was in charge of the reapers, “Whose young woman is this?” Was she pretty? Was she unrecognized?

2:6-7

So the servant who was in charge of the reapers answered and said, “It is the young Moabite woman who came back with Naomi from the country of Moab. Or as has been shown in the translation, she **came back from the [fields] of Moab** and “happened unto the fields belonging to Boaz.” **7 And she said, ‘Please let me glean and gather after the reapers among the sheaves.’ So she came and has continued from morning until now, though she rested a little in the house.”** She has worked most the morning and maybe into the afternoon. This is not your typical welfare program. She was working hard to eat.

2:8-9

Then Boaz said to Ruth, “You will listen, my daughter, will you not? Do not go to glean in another field, nor go from here, but stay close by my young women. 9 Let your eyes *be* on the field which they reap, and go after them. Have I not commanded the young men not to touch you? And when you are thirsty, go to the vessels and drink from what the young men have drawn.”

¹²In other words, welfare and immigration reform are addressed in these chapters.

2:10

So she fell on her face, bowed down to the ground, and said to him, “Why have I found favor in your eyes, grace, then, found its occasion (as it did with Cornelius, Acts 10) because of one’s conduct. So much for the ideas that it cannot be called **favor** if one places himself in a position to be a recipient of grace/**favor**. This can be seen in a teacher who considers a student’s study habits when determining whether to give “grace points” or a second chance at taking a test.

that you should take notice of me, since I am a foreigner?” This seems like a foretaste of the joyful realization of Mephibosheth (2 Samuel 9). Her gratitude was audible, visible, emotional, and it sacrificed some pride. This is, by the way, a good token of the humility of Ruth for “proud people don’t feel amazed at being treated well.”¹³

2:11-12

And Boaz answered and said to her, “It has been fully reported to me, all that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband, and how you have left your father and your mother and the land of your birth, and have come to a people whom you did not know before. 12 The LORD repay your work, and a full reward be given you by the LORD God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge.” Boaz sees that he is a dispenser of grace on behalf of **God**. Perhaps that is not as amazing as his seeing himself as a receiver of faith on behalf of **God** also. In other words, **Boaz** was showing everybody what God was like. At this point, we could say that God is apparently **rewarding** Ruth because of His Name being at stake. She **came** and trusted for **refuge**, and **God rewarded**. This appears to be what God desires to be (Matthew 11:28-30; Matthew 23:37; Hebrews 11:6): “not an employer looking for employment but an Eagle looking for people who will take refuge under his wings.”¹⁴

2:13

Then she said, “Let me find favor in your sight, my lord; for you have comforted me, and have spoken kindly to your maidservant, though I am not like one of your maidservants.” “I know I did not grow up with the girls from around here.”

2:14-16

Now Boaz said to her at mealtime, “Come here, and eat of the bread, and dip your piece of bread in the vinegar.” The noon meal, it seems, based on verse 17.

Vinegar (Hebrew *chometz*) was a beverage consisting generally of wine or strong drink turned sour. It was probably made by mixing water and new grape juice and leaving it to ferment. The Nazarites were forbidden to drink it (Numbers 6:3). It may have been excessively sour (Proverbs 10:26). It was similar to the *posca* of the Romans, which was a thin sour wine, unintoxicating, and used only by the poor. This is what is referred to

¹³Piper, 64.

¹⁴Piper, 72.

ⁿ 1 Sam. 25:41

under the name vinegar in the KJV (wine, wine vinegar, NIV) in the narrative of the crucifixion of our Lord (see Matthew 27:34, 48; Luke 23:36; John 19:29–30).¹⁵

So she sat beside the reapers, She didn't sit with the "gleaners." She is with those who actually belong, by design, on the field.

Religiously, this is us sitting beside Israel.

This is me sitting beside the big preacher

This is me sitting among the angels (they are called the reapers)

¹⁸ **w**Now *this is the genealogy of Perez:* ^x**Perez** we are reaching back into Genesis 38 then. **begot Hezron;** ¹⁹**Hezron begot Ram, and Ram begot Amminadab;** ²⁰**Amminadab begot** ^y**Nahshon, and Nahshon begot** ^z**Salmon;** ⁸²¹**Salmon begot Boaz,** We now see the main similarity between Judges 19 and Ruth: Judges 19-21 has a whore who lives in Bethlehem while here in this story it is "the son of a whore" who lives there. Matthew 1's genealogy tells us that **Salmon** was the husband of Rahab the harlot (found in Joshua 2-3; Hebrews 11; James 2). **and Boaz begot Obed;** ²²**Obed begot Jesse, and Jesse begot** ^a**David.** We know, then, that this book was written at least after **David** had begun his reign (1 Samuel 17).¹⁶ This genealogy, then, reaches back to Genesis 38 and goes forward to at least 1 Samuel 16. Ruth, then, is the 3rd non-Jewish woman in Jesus' genealogy in Matthew 1.¹⁷

¹⁵James M. Freeman and Harold J. Chadwick, *Manners & Customs of the Bible* (North Brunswick, NJ: Bridge-Logos Publishers, 1998), 200-201.

^w 1 Chr. 2:4, 5; Matt. 1:1–7

^x Num. 26:20, 21

^y Num. 1:7

^z Matt. 1:4

⁸ Heb. *Salmah*

^a 1 Chr. 2:15; Matt. 1:6

¹⁶ Ruth 4:22; when one realizes the "Bethlehem-Judah vs. Benjamin" dialogue in Judges 17-21 and the fight between Judah (David) and Benjamin (Ishobosheth) in 2 Samuel, it becomes apparent that this is either political propaganda to ask those of Israel to follow David (and is written in the first 7 years of David's reign) or this is celebratory in view of David's full kingdom in the last 33 years of his reign. In view of Judges 1:21 & 2 Samuel 5:5, it seems like it was before the unification of the kingdom under David.

¹⁷Perhaps Bathsheeba is the 4th (since she was married to a Hittite).