

Exegetical Notes for Ruth 1:1-2

KEY

Barber = *Ruth: An Expository Commentary* (Cyril J. Barber). Chicago: Moody Press, 1983.

BBC = *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament*. Edited by John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews and Mark W. Chavalas. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000.

Block = Block, Daniel I., *Judges, Ruth in the New American Commentary, Vol 6*. Edited by E. Ray Clendenen. Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 1999.

Bush = Bush, Frederick. *Ruth/Esther in the Word Biblical Commentary, Vol 9*. Edited by David H. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker. Dallas: Word Books, 1996.

Campbell = Campbell, Edward F., *Ruth: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes, and Commentary in The Anchor Bible, Vol 7*. Edited by William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman. Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, 1975.

Harrison = *Introduction to the Old Testament* (R.K. Harrison). Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1969.

K&D = Keil, C.F. and Delitzsch, F. in the *Keil and Delitzsch Commentary on the Old Testament, Vol 2*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1989.

MBC = MacArthur, John. *The MacArthur Bible Commentary*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005.

TWOT = *The Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (R. Laird Harris; Gleason L. Archer, Jr.; Bruce Waltke). Chicago: Moody Press, 1980. Two Volumes.

Wood = *Distressing Days of the Judges* (Leon Wood). Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975.

Three Steps of Exegesis

1. **Translation.** Work through a transliteration of the text and translate the passage directly, if possible.
2. **Exegesis.** Detailed exegesis of the passage by way of a "shot-gun" approach, using various exegetical tools.
 - Work from critical commentaries to practical.
 - Word studies and cross-references (analogy of the faith).
 - Applicational analysis - applicational issues arising from the text.
 - Theological analysis - theological issues arising from the text.
3. **Structural Analysis.** Diagram the passage developing a detailed outline and central proposition.
 - Smooth away all of the wrinkles.
 - The process is to yield an accurate "statue" as I chisel away the debris.

TRANSLATION, OUTLINE AND CENTRAL PROPOSITION

HEBREW TEXT (BHS):

Verse 1:

וַיְהִי בַיָּמֵי שְׁפֹט הַשֹּׁפְטִים וַיְהִי רָעַב בְּאֶרֶץ וְיִלְדָּ אִישׁ מִבֵּית
לֶחֶם יְהוּדָה לָגוּר בְּשָׂדֵי מוֹאָב הוּא וְאִשְׁתּוֹ וּשְׁנֵי בָנָיו:

Verse 2:

וְשֵׁם הָאִישׁ אֱלִימֶלֶךְ וְשֵׁם אִשְׁתּוֹ נַעֲמִי וְשֵׁם שְׁנֵי-בָנָיו | מַחֲלֹן
וְכִלְיוֹן אֶפְרַתִּים מִבֵּית לֶחֶם יְהוּדָה וַיָּבֹאוּ שָׂדֵי-מוֹאָב
וַיְהִיו-שָׁם:

ENGLISH TRANSLATION (NASB):

1 Now it came about in the days when the judges governed, that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of Bethlehem in Judah went to sojourn in the land of Moab with his wife and his two sons.
2 And the name of the man was Elimelech, and the name of his wife, Naomi; and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion, Ephrathites of Bethlehem in Judah. Now they entered the land of Moab and remained there.

PASSAGE OUTLINE:

I. Act One: The Royal Line with Hope in Ruin (1:1-22)

- A. Scene One: Retreat from Bethlehem (vv. 1-2)
- B. Scene Two: Ruin in Moab (vv. 3-5)
- C. Scene Three: Returning to Bethlehem (vv. 6-22)

II. Act Two: The Royal Line with Hope Renewed (2:1-23)

- A. Scene One: Ruth Reaping (vv. 1-7)
- B. Scene Two: Ruth Rewarded - Part 1 (vv. 8-13)
- C. Scene Three: Ruth Rewarded - Part 2 (vv. 14-17)
- D. Scene Four: Ruth Reports (vv. 18-23)

III. Act Three: The Royal Line with Hope at Risk (3:1-18)

- A. Scene One: Remedy Proposed (vv. 1-5)

- B. Scene Two: Reception or Rejection (vv. 6-15)
- C. Scene Three: Resting in Providence (vv. 16-18)

IV. Act Four: The Royal Line with Hope Restored (4:1-17)

- A. Scene One: Resolving Legal Matters (vv. 1-12)
- B. Scene Two: Romance and Redemption (vv. 13-17)

Epilogue - Royal Rights and The Resultant Redeemer (4:18-22)

SERMON OUTLINE:

I. Act One: The Royal Line with Hope in Crisis (1:1-22)

- A. Scene One: Retreat from Bethlehem (vv. 1-2)

PASSAGE SUBJECT/THEME (what is the passage talking about): Introduction to the narrative

PASSAGE COMPLEMENT/THRUST (what is the passage saying about what it's talking about): is set with a crisis in Bethlehem and a move to Moab

PASSAGE MAIN IDEA (central proposition of the text): None - Introduction to Ruth

CENTRAL PROPOSITION OF THE SERMON: God is bigger than your crisis

SERMONIC IDEA/TITLE: Introduction to Ruth

HISTORICAL/CULTURAL/GRAMMATICAL CONTEXT

Historical Background

The story of Ruth is set during the time of the Judges, roughly 1375-1020 BC. There's no indication as to exactly when over the course of this 350 year time-frame the events occurred. If there are no gaps in the genealogy the date would correspond to the second half of the 12th century, around the time of Samson.

Comparative Timeline

Abraham - 2100

Joseph - 1900

Exodus - 1450

After the Exodus the Jews wandered in the wilderness for 40 years. Death of Moses
Joshua leads the Jews into Canaan. Subsequent conquest of Canaan around 1400 BC.
Joshua dies and his death leads into the period of the Judges.

Book of Joshua ends with his death (24:29-31). The next book in the OT - Judges - begins with a restatement of Joshua's death and the introduction of Othniel, Israel's first Judge.

The Judges

All this is described in the Old Testament book of Judges. The book takes its name from the fact that its heroes are called 'judges'. This terminology would most obviously suggest they were concerned with the administration of law, and the Hebrew word for 'judge' is in fact very similar to titles given to government officials elsewhere in the ancient world—at Mari, Ebla and Ugarit. Some of the people mentioned in Judges may well have had some administrative functions, though it can be misleading to compare the 'judges' of early Israel with figures in other cultures. Without exception, these other states all had a monarchy, and a much more sophisticated political apparatus than Israel had at this time. By contrast to the powerful kings who headed up the many city states of the land, the great judges of the Old Testament stories did not owe their position to a bureaucratic or hereditary appointment. It was, rather, something that stemmed naturally from their remarkable gifts of great wisdom, bravery and leadership—qualities that were demonstrated not in legal arguments about justice, but in the actual work of getting justice for their people. They were men and women of great political vision and religious devotion, and the stories about them show people who were determined that the promises of God and the commitment of the people, as expressed in the covenant made at Mount Sinai, should be enshrined in the very fabric of their new emerging society.

The Old Testament names twelve judges, but records details about only six of them. Of these, only one, Othniel, is linked with the tribes who eventually came to be associated with the southern part of the country (Judges 1:11–15; 3:7–11; Joshua 15:13–19). All the others are

associated with northern tribes. This perhaps reflects the relative strength of Israel in different parts of the country at the time. But it could also suggest that the stories themselves were first handed on, and later written down, in the northern part of the country. The meaning that the editor of the book of Judges found in these stories is certainly similar to the message of the prophets who later flourished in that part of the land. The interpretative framework of the book of Judges implies that the real meaning of Israel's experience can only be understood from a religious viewpoint, and describes all the stories as following the same pattern, and teaching the same lessons (Judges 2:11–23):

- * When Israel was faithful to God, the nation prospered.
- * When Israel deserted their own God, Yahweh, and turned to other deities, they were unable to resist their enemies.
- * Finding themselves in great distress, the people of Israel turned again to God, who in turn provided a deliverer for them (a judge).
- * After the death of a judge, the same pattern of events was typically repeated all over again.

[Drane, J. W. (2000). *Introducing the Old Testament* (Completely rev. and updated.) (76–78). Oxford: Lion Publishing plc.]

The story encompasses about a dozen years:

Ruth covers about eleven to twelve years according to the following scenario: (1:1-18, ten years in Moab (1:4); (2) 1:19-2:23, several months (mid-April to mid-June) in Boaz's field (1:22; 2:23); (3) 3:1-18, one day in Bethlehem and one night at the threshing floor; and (4) 4:4:1-22, about one year in Bethlehem. [MBC, 289]

Working backwards from the time of David's reign would place the events during the time of the judgeship of Jair (Judges 10:3-5) around 1126-1105 BC.

Authorship and Title

Talmudic tradition asserts that Samuel was the author of both Judges and Ruth. Harrison sees this as unlikely in light of the fact that the concluding genealogy presumes that David was well known at the time (perhaps the genealogy was a later gloss?).

Jewish tradition credits Samuel as the author, which is plausible since he did not die (1 Sam. 25:1) until after he had anointed David as God's chosen king (1 Sam. 16:6-13). However, neither internal features nor external testimony conclusively identifies the writer. This exquisite story most likely appeared shortly before or during David's reign of Israel (1011-971 BC), since David is mentioned (4:17, 22) but not Solomon. [MBC, 288]

The book is named after one of the main characters. It is the only OT book named after a non-Israelite (Ruth was a Moabite). Five times the author notes this (1:22, 2:2,21, 4:5,10). It's one of two books in the entire Bible named after a woman - there are some parallels to Esther as far as survival of the race is concerned.

Ruth may not even be the main character:

The story opens by describing the crisis in Naomi's family, highlighting her own emptiness, and concludes with the resolution of the crisis and the declaration of her fullness in the birth of Obed. Indeed in the conclusion (4:13-17) the narrator appears intent on drawing the reader's attention away from Ruth. This impression of the secondary role of Ruth is reinforced by the manner in which the characters relate in the book. Scholars have recognized the importance of direct speech in this book. No fewer than fifty-five of the eighty-five verses contain dialogue. To be even more precise, of the 1,294 words in the book, 678 (52.4 percent) occur on the lips of the characters. Of the three main actors in the drama, however, Ruth speaks least often, and her speeches are the shortest. Based on the plot, the book is more appropriately titled "The Book of Naomi"; and on the dialogue. "The Book of Boaz." On the other hand, given the concluding episode and genealogy, as well as the purpose of the book, it might even have been called "The Book of Obed." No doubt the present title reflects the narrator's and reader's fascination with and special admiration for the character of Ruth. [Block, 588]

Date

Probably a time subsequent to the Judges as the author adds explanatory glosses (Ruth 4:1-12) explaining cultural practices that were no longer widely used at the time of writing – and also refers to the time period of the Judges as a distinct time that was past (1:). Also note that the genealogy ends w/David. Date of approx. 1000 BC during the earlier part of David's rein seems approp.

Keil places the authorship at the time of the early monarchy and others have suggested the time of David, the time of Hezekiah, the time of the exile, or post-exilic (the time of Ezra / Nehemiah). Harrison refutes a post-exilic date (cf. 1061).

As to the genealogy, Harrison notes that the absence of Solomon's name argues for an earlier date, Solomon being an off-spring of Boaz. Harrison adds:

Although in the view of the present writer the book was composed at a considerably earlier date, the fact that it was not fully canonical in the days of Ezra would prevent it from being utilized as a ground of appeal, however widely known the story itself was. [1061]

Also,

In narratives such as this it is obviously very difficult to assign the work to a specific period with any confidence, since as shown above, the contents can be employed variously to demonstrate an early or a much later date. To the writer the former would appear more preferable, and it may be that the work was in existence at the close of the ninth century B.C., or the early part of the following century. [Harrison, 1062]

Block writes:

If the Book of Ruth derives from late exilic or early postexilic times, it is remarkable how hard scholars must strain to find eight late features in a composition of 1,294 words. . . . On the other hand but for the same linguistic reason, Weinfeld's dating of this book to the ninth century may be too early. [Block, 596]

Block adds that dating of Ruth must take into account 3 factors:

1) [T]he reference to "the days when judges governed" in the opening verse suggests that the author was familiar with the premonarchic period as a distinct era and that this idyllic account may have been deliberately composed against the darkness of the period as it is portrayed in the Book of Judges. . . . To be more specific, if the Book of Judges was composed to alert what remained of the nation of Israel to the people's spiritual declension during the reign of wicked Manasseh, as we have suggested, it is unlikely that the Book of Ruth was written before the latter half of the seventh century B.C. [596]

2)[T]he book's interest in the Davidic house is best interpreted against the backdrop of the renaissance of the dynasty. If the book was written after Manasseh, only the reign of Josiah (540-609 B.C.) qualifies as a chronological candidate for the origin of Ruth. . . . This date respects the cultural and chronological distance between the composition of 4:7 and the events described in this chapter. Apparently the author's audience was no longer familiar with the custom of the sandal. [596-97]

3) [A] Northern provenance fits both the political and linguistic realities Josiah's reign. [597]

Text and Canonicity

The Hebrew text is very well preserved. There are few passages that leave any obscurity and the most important of these would be 1:21 and 2:7.

The place of the book in the Hebrew canon as the work to be read at the Feast of Weeks, when the close of the grain harvest was celebrated, indicates the importance that Jewish tradition assigned to this delightful narrative. In the Hebrew Bible the book occupied a position in the *K^ethubhim*, as noted earlier; and the Talmud placed it at the head of this great division of Scripture, before the Psalter. More recent Jewish tradition incorporated it into the *Megilloth*. The LXX placed Ruth after Judges, presumably because of the identity of historical background, and this tradition, which was also followed by the Vulgate, has been maintained in most modern versions of the Old Testament. Josephus also joined Ruth with Judges. [Harrison, 1063]

Block writes that "the canonical status of the Book of Ruth seems to have been recognized from the beginning" and adds in the footnote: "The slightest hint of debate may be found in the Babylonian Talmud, where *t. Meg 7a* observes that Ruth, like Esther and the Song of Songs, does indeed 'make the hands unclean' (the talmudic expression for the canonical books)." [Block, 588]

Theme and Purpose

Kinsman Redeemer / Levirate marriage

The book serves to trace the history of King David (his family tree is not in the books of Samuel). It points to Christ as the antitype of the kinsman redeemer (Boaz) and the ultimate prophetic fulfillment of it. Redemption requires a kinsman redeemer.

The kinsman redeemer would redeem family property that had changed ownership and marry a childless widow in order to raise children in her deceased husband's name.

Deuteronomy 25:5–10 5 “When brothers live together and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the deceased shall not be married outside the family to a strange man. Her husband’s brother shall go in to her and take her to himself as wife and perform the duty of a husband’s brother to her. 6 “And it shall be that the first-born whom she bears shall assume the name of his dead brother, that his name may not be blotted out from Israel. 7 “But if the man does not desire to take his brother’s wife, then his brother’s wife shall go up to the gate to the elders and say, ‘My husband’s brother refuses to establish a name for his brother in Israel; he is not willing to perform the duty of a husband’s brother to me.’ 8 “Then the elders of his city shall summon him and speak to him. And if he persists and says, ‘I do not desire to take her,’ 9 then his brother’s wife shall come to him in the sight of the elders, and pull his sandal off his foot and spit in his face; and she shall declare, ‘Thus it is done to the man who does not build up his brother’s house.’ 10 “And in Israel his name shall be called, ‘The house of him whose sandal is removed.’

There were significant obligations laid on kinsmen. Among the more important we may mention the following.

Since a woman, married to a man, would normally have the privilege of bearing his son and heir, in the case of the untimely death of the husband without a son, the law of levirate (Lat. levir, ‘husband’s brother’) *MARRIAGE came into force, and progeny was raised up to the dead man who had died ‘without a name in Israel’ by his next of kin (Dt. 25:5–10). There is a good illustration of this in the book of Ruth.

Then in the matter of inheritance, a man’s property was normally passed on to his son or sons. Failing these, it went to his daughters, and then in order to his brethren, to his father’s brethren, and finally to his kinsman who was nearest to him (Nu. 27:1–11).

Again it was obligatory on a kinsman to redeem the property of a fellow-kinsman who had fallen into the hands of creditors (Lv. 25:25ff.).

In the special circumstances where a man’s life was taken by another, since this was part of the life of the family, an obligation rested on the son, or the brother, or the next of kin in order, to

take vengeance (cf. Gn. 9:5–6). Where kinship ends, there is no longer any *AVENGER (go'el). [j.a.t. (1996). Kin, Kinsman. In D. R. W. Wood, I. H. Marshall, A. R. Millard, J. I. Packer & D. J. Wiseman (Eds.), New Bible dictionary (D. R. W. Wood, I. H. Marshall, A. R. Millard, J. I. Packer & D. J. Wiseman, Ed.) (3rd ed.) (645). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.]

Bethlehem Trilogy

Judges 17-18 - A young Levite from Bethlehem leaves his hometown and meets a man from Ephraim named Micah. Micah hires the Levite to be his private priest in idolatry. He was later hired by the tribe of Dan and relocated with the Danites to Laish in N. Galilee. It was there that the Levite est. a cult center that proved to be a stumbling block to God's people for the next 1000 years. [cf. Eugene Merrill, Bib Sac, April-June 1985, p. 131]

Judges 19-21 - Again we have Bethlehem and Ephraim and a Levite. The Levite from Ephraim takes a concubine from among the young women in Bethlehem. She went out on her own and was taken captive by the men of Gibeah who assaulted her through the night and left her dead. Upon finding out her husband assembled all the elders of Israel at Bethel where they determined to seek vengeance. The subsequent attack nearly exterminated the entire tribe of Benjamin.

The third story is that of Ruth. In contrast to the other two Bethlehem narratives, this one ends up good. Undoing the evil related to Bethlehem by bringing honor and a future redeemer. Not only was David born in Beth. but so was Christ his descendent.

As in the previous two stories (Judg. 17:7-8: 19:10) a man "left Bethlehem in Judah" (Ruth 1:1). But whereas the previous two men sullied the reputation of the town by their subsequent behavior, Elimelech and his family enhanced it. Bethlehem in the first two accounts suffered at the hands of Ephraimites and Benjamites respectively, but in Ruth the town became a most suitable setting for the birthplace of King David. [Eugene Merrill, Bib Sac, April-June 1985, p. 132]

Other Themes

The book may answer the question, depending on the date of composition, how King David could emerge out of the dark period of the judges.

There is a connection between Ruth and Tamar (cf. 4:12).

As already pointed out, a part of the community blessing to Ruth was that her family might be "like the house of Perez whom Tamar bore to Judah. "Tamar, like Ruth, was a foreigner who had married into the covenant people (Gen 38:6). When her first marriage failed because of the death of her husband Er (Judah's eldest son), the levirate custom was invoked whereby she might marry the second son Onan. This arrangement too came to naught as did a subsequent attempt with the third son. The result, of course, was the incestuous relationship between Judah and Tamar which produced the birth of twins, Perez and Zerah (Gen 38:24–30).

The levirate custom is also featured in the story of Ruth (4:5) but this time with favorable results—Boaz raised up seed in the name of Ruth’s deceased husband.¹⁶ The circumstances under which the respective relationships were initiated are also strikingly similar. In the Tamar account (Gen 38:14–16) Judah was seduced under the cover of a disguise worn by his daughter-in-law. In the case of Ruth (Ruth 3:6–13), she approached Boaz to propose marriage under the cover of the darkness of night. After it had become apparent that Tamar was pregnant, Judah haled her before the village tribunal in order to accuse her formally of prostitution and seek her death. Instead, he himself was found out and became the object of shame and condemnation (Gen 38:24–26). Similarly, Boaz and Ruth appeared before the elders to announce his redemption of her and their impending marriage. This time the couple was praised and blessed (4:1–12). In each instance, moreover, the “husband” was advanced in age and sired sons when the prospects for doing so would ordinarily be bleak. Most significant of all is the fact that both Tamar and Ruth bore sons in the Davidic/messianic line. This at once is the most evident and precise link binding the two stories together. Jacob’s dying blessing of Judah pronounced, “The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, Until he comes to whom it belongs¹⁷ and the obedience of the nations is his” (Gen 49:10).

The book also speak of unselfish devotion and a reminder that the Gospel is for all men, not just the Israelites (Ruth was a Gentile and her lineage is traced to the Redeemer of the World, Jesus Christ). Gentile blood links Christ to the entire world.[Eugene Merrill, *Bib Sac*, April-June 1985, p. 134]

Our English Bibles follow the LXX in placing Ruth after Judges. This was recognized by Josephus who attached Ruth to Judges. The contrast between the two books is noteworthy. Judges chronicles Israel's increasing unfaithfulness and apostasy. Ruth is a book filled with hope - a book that points to the Redeemer of mankind, her future progeny, Jesus Christ. Even the 'high' characters of the Judges (Gideon, Samson) showed elements of compromise with Canaanite practices (Canaanite "worldliness") - yet Ruth in particular shines forth in her display of authentic faith and trust in God's provision. Like Paul (cf. Philippians 3) Ruth's nobility was demonstrated by her character not by her pedigree.

In the maj. of Hebrew mss Ruth appears as the first of the "5 Scrolls" - the *Megilloth*, the OT books regularly read at Jewish festivals.

Interestingly, the Masoretes placed it right after Proverbs begging the question were these two women (Ruth and Naomi) being championed as prime examples of the type of woman described in Prov. 31?

The book centers on the concept of *chesed* - covenant faithfulness. The word itself is used 3x (1:8, 2:20, 3:10) translated by the NASB using a form of the word "kindness." It's a word that cannot be translated by an English equiv.

It is a strong relational word that wraps up in itself an entire cluster of concepts . . . love, mercy, grace, kindness, goodness, benevolence, loyalty, covenant faithfulness . . . [Block, 605]

It is striking that no one in the book prays for a resolution of his own crisis. In each case a person prays that Yahweh would bless someone else. This is a mark of *hesed*. [Block, 612]

In the beginning there is emptiness and in the end there is fulness (cf. 1:20-21 with 4:13).

The narrator may have had one primary goal in mind—the exaltation of David by telling the beautiful story of his roots—but in the process of developing that goal he plays with several themes. [Block, 604]

Note the danger of using a moralistic approach to teaching or preaching through Ruth.

Basic Structure

Ruth is a narrative, a story, or a novella. It has a plot line with a crisis followed by the resolution. It's not fiction, parable or proverb, but history, as demonstrated by the time (1:1) and the ending genealogy (genealogies were important historic pieces of factual information derived from court records, cf. 1 Chron. 9:1).

On the contrary, the picture of the lives of the characters is entirely realistic and in keeping with what is known of life in Palestine in the late second millennium B.C.: the famine and consequent migration of Elimelech and his family (1:1); the allusions to methods of burial (1:17); the geographic portrayal of outside the town; the scenes of workers harvesting the grain (chap. 2); emotions of the characters in the face of grief, anxiety, joy; the nature of the social relationships between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, landowner and workers, citizen and the citizenry, husband and wife, grandmother and grandson; the legal process (4:1-12). . . . Like the Book of Judges the Book of Ruth should be interpreted as a historiographic document. It describes real experiences of real people in real times at real places. [Block, 602-03]

"Goethe reportedly labeled this piece of anonymous but unexcelled literature as 'the loveliest, complete work on a small scale.' What Venus is to statuary and the Mona Lisa is to paintings, Ruth is to literature." [MBC, 288]

From D. Block:

I. The Exposition (1:1-2)

A. Opening Characters Introduced - Elimelech, Naomi, Mahlon, Chilion

1. Famine and the move to Moab

- a. Significance of famine in Israel
- b. Poor relationship between Israel and Moab

II. The First Complication [crisis] (1:3-22)

A. Deaths of Elimelech, Mahlon and Chilion

B. Introduction of Ruth

C. The Crisis: Will the Line of Elimelech Die Out?

1. How can the line be rescued so that YHWH's chosen king David may appear in due course?

III. The Solution (2:1-23)

A. Introduction of Boaz

IV. The Second Complication [crisis] (3:1-18)

A. Will Boaz or Another Function as Kinsman Redeemer?

V. The Resolution (4:1-17)

A. Boaz Gains the Right to be Kinsman Redeemer

VI. Genealogical Epilogue (4:18-22)

To concretize the significance of the story of Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz and to assure that the reader does not simply read this book for entertainment or its human interest value, the narrator draws on official records to remind the reader of David's genealogical history. The story he has just told is more than an inspiring tale of genuinely good people; it describes the critical role played by the seventh link in this chain. This story is to the genealogy leading from Perez to David what Enoch is to the family line that leads from Adam to Noah in Gen 5:22a,24. In both cases the seventh generation is distinguished for its spirituality. Whereas the author of Genesis states the case with a sentence ("Enoch walked with God"), our author develops the theme with a story. Righteous Boaz shows us what it means to walk with God. In the process the narrator offers another dimension of David's right to the throne. Far from being disqualified because Moabite blood flows in his veins, it is precisely the Moabite connection that raises this genealogy above the ordinary. [Block, 619]

Block suggests the book may also be seen as a "4 act drama:"

Act 1: The Crisis for the Royal Line (1:1-21)

1. Scene One: The Setting for the Crisis (1:1-2)
2. Scene Two: The Nature of the Crisis (1:3-5)
3. Scene Three: The Response to the Crisis (1:6-18)
4. Scene Four: The Interpretation of the Crisis (1:19-21)

Act 2: The Ray of Hope for the Royal Line (1:22-2:23)

1. Scene One: The New Setting (1:22-2:1)
2. Scene Two: The Initiative of Ruth (2:2-3)
3. Scene Three: The Grace of Boaz (2:4-16)
4. Scene Four: The Results (2:17-23)

Act 3: The Complication for the Royal Line (3:1-18)

1. Scene One: The Scheme (3:1-5)
2. Scene Two: The Implementation of the Scheme (3:6-15)
3. Scene Three: The Results of the Scheme (3:16-18)

Act 4: The Rescue of the Royal Line (4:1-17)

1. Scene One: The Legal Resolution (4:1-12)
2. Scene Two: The Genealogical Resolution (4:13-17)

Epilogue: The Royal Genealogy (4:18-22)

Theological Contribution

Most of the explicit refs. to G. come from the lips of the characters. Naomi refers explicitly to G. 5x. In 3 she uses the covt. name of God (YHWH) and 2x she id's Him as Shaddai (abbrev. of El Shaddai) - The Almighty G. who creates and rules the world, punishing evil and rewarding good. She also uses the word *chesed* in her first speech (1:8). She recognizes God's sovereignty and character in both mercy and judgment.

However, acc. to Block, she may not have been a "confessional monotheist" -

Her comment in 1:15, that Orpah has gone back to her people and her gods, suggests that hers was a compromised theology. She recognized that Yahweh was the God of Israel; but like Ruth, Jephthah (Judg 11:24), and undoubtedly many other Israelites of the time, she may have believed that each nation had its own particular patron deity. This observation will influence how we interpret the move of this family to the land of Moab in the commentary below. [606]

Ruth makes a tremendous theological confession in 1:16-17.

Boaz refers to God 6x, 5 by His covt. name and once by His relationship to Israel (God of Israel).

The sovereign providence of God is seen t/o the book. Block ID's 4 ways (608ff):

God's hand is seen in "natural events" such as a famine in the land. The famine must be seen from the background of Lev. 26:19-20 and Deut. 28:23-24. Issue of secondary causes.

God's hand is seen in what men view as "coincidental happenings." The grammar of 2:3 emphasizes this - lit. "her chance chanced upon." Cf. Prov. 16:33.

God's hand is seen in the "daring schemes of humans." This is seen in the questionable and culturally unacceptable action of Ruth in laying at the feet of Boaz.

God's hand is seen in the legal process. This is seen in Boaz' legal resolution (4:1-12).

By now the reader knows that nothing happens by chance, and when Mr. So- and-So (NIV "my friend," 4:1) happens to pass by the gate where Boaz had sat down, this too is attributable to the hand of God.. If Ruth was present for the proceedings, one may only imagine her emotions as the case proceeded. Her heart must have sunk as the man with first rights to Elimelech's land said he would take it. However, when he declined because Boaz reminded him that Ruth goes with the land, her hope will have risen. But how does one account for this change of mind on the man's part? Ostensibly the answer is found in v. 6, but the excuse he gives is garbled and feeble sounding. But it is enough for Boaz, whose speech of acceptance of the verdict is s a model of clarity and logic. The case could easily have gone the other way, but it appears that in the mind of the narrator the outcome was determined by God from the beginning. [Block, 610]

The book is a commentary on the fact of God's choice in keeping a remnant alive in the midst of apostasy. In the book of Judges, every character is apostate at worst and spiritually compromised at best. Yet in Ruth, while there is at times a lack of maturity, there is no real lack of character among the main players.

After Judges the Davidic Dynasty. *Post Tenebras Lux*. The Gospel.

In the providence and grace of God, five hundred years later the New Testament opens with an announcement of the fulfillment of this promise to another young woman who displayed all the marks of *hesed* and had found favor with God (Luke 1:26-?-38). Mary would be most blessed among women, for she too would bear a son. But this son would be greater than Ruth's child and even greater than her grandchild. His name would be Jesus, he would be called the Son of the Most High (*hupsistos* in the LXX = *'elyon* in Hb.), and the LORD (= Yahweh) would give him the throne of his father David. This greatest son of Boaz and Ruth would rule over Jacob forever in a reign that knows no bounds. [Block, 616]

At least seven major theological themes emerge in Ruth. First, Ruth the Moabitess illustrates that God's redemptive plan extended beyond the Jews to Gentiles (2:12). Second, Ruth demonstrates that women are coheirs with men of God's salvation grace. Third, Ruth portrays the virtuous woman of Proverbs 31:10 (cf. 3:11). Fourth, Ruth describes God's sovereign (1:6; 4:13) and providential care (2:3) of seemingly unimportant people at apparently insignificant times which later prove to be monumentally crucial to accomplishing God's will. Fifth, Ruth, along with Tamar (Gen. 38), Rahab (Josh. 2), and Bathsheba (2 Sam. 11, 12) stand in the genealogy of the messianic line (4:17, 22; cf. Matt. 1:5). Sixth, Boaz, as a type of Christ, becomes Ruth's kinsman- redeemer (4:1-12). Finally, David's right (and thus Christ's right) to the throne of Israel is traced back to Judah (4:18-22; cf. Gen. 49:8-12). [MBC, 289]

Striking is the absence of any reference to Moses, the Exodus, or the Covt. at Sinai.

The complex nature and function of biblical covenants lie outside the purview of this article but it is generally recognized that the so-called Mosaic Covenant differs both formally and functionally from other biblical covenants.²⁰ It is also conceded that there are important connections and correspondences between the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants. This is most apparent in Ruth itself. The narrator is writing, among other reasons, to clarify the fact that the Davidic dynasty is not something which sprang out of the conditional Mosaic Covenant but rather that it has its historical and theological roots in the promises to the patriarchs. Israel as the servant people of Yahweh might rise and fall, be blessed or cursed, but the Davidic dynasty would remain intact forever because God had pledged Himself to Abraham to produce through the patriarch a line of kings which might find its historical locus in Israel but which would have ramifications extending above and beyond Israel. The kings (pl.) promised to Abram (Gen 17:6, 16) became more specifically identified by Jacob as one (sing.) to whom royal scepter and staff would belong (Gen 49:10). He, this one from Judah, would, moreover, be the one who would exercise dominion over Moab and Edom (Num 24:17–19). When Samuel was sent to Bethlehem to anoint a successor to Saul he was told that the Lord had provided for a king from among the sons of Jesse (1 Sam 16:1). David's anointing by oil, accompanied as it was by the descent of the Spirit of God on him, confirmed not only that he was the proper selection from among Jesse's more eligible sons but also that he was the long-awaited fulfillment of the patriarchal promise (cf. 1 Sam 2:10). [Eugene Merrill, *Bib Sac*, April-June 1985, p. 135-36]

Most important of these, perhaps, is the role of the pure and noble Moabite woman Ruth who, as a descendant of the wayward and schismatic Lot, ironically effected a reunification with the Abrahamic clan from which he had separated. She became then not only a vital link in the Abraham to David (to Christ) messianic chain, but also an instrument to bridge the chasm between Judah and Moab, a kind of type or paradigm of the reconciliation which God desires among nations as a fulfillment of the patriarchal blessing.

When one examines the genealogical list of Matthew 1 he is struck by the fact that only four women are mentioned there, one of those being Ruth. Of these four, two (Tamar and Rahab) were Canaanites, one (Ruth) a Moabite, and one (Bathsheba) presumably a Hittite. It is possible to draw any number of conclusions from this observation, some of which have already been suggested. What these women shared in common besides their foreignness was their weakness, their simplicity in terms of their socio-economic world.²⁵ Surely they exemplify the principle of the sovereign grace of God who is not only able to use but who seems to delight in using the foreign, the frail, and perhaps even the disreputable to accomplish His eternal purposes. No one illustrates this better than gentle and loyal Ruth. In fulfillment of the prophetic blessing she became "like Rachel and Leah, both of whom built the house of Israel" (Ruth 4:11). [Eugene Merrill, *Bib Sac*, April-June 1985, p. 138]

John Piper:

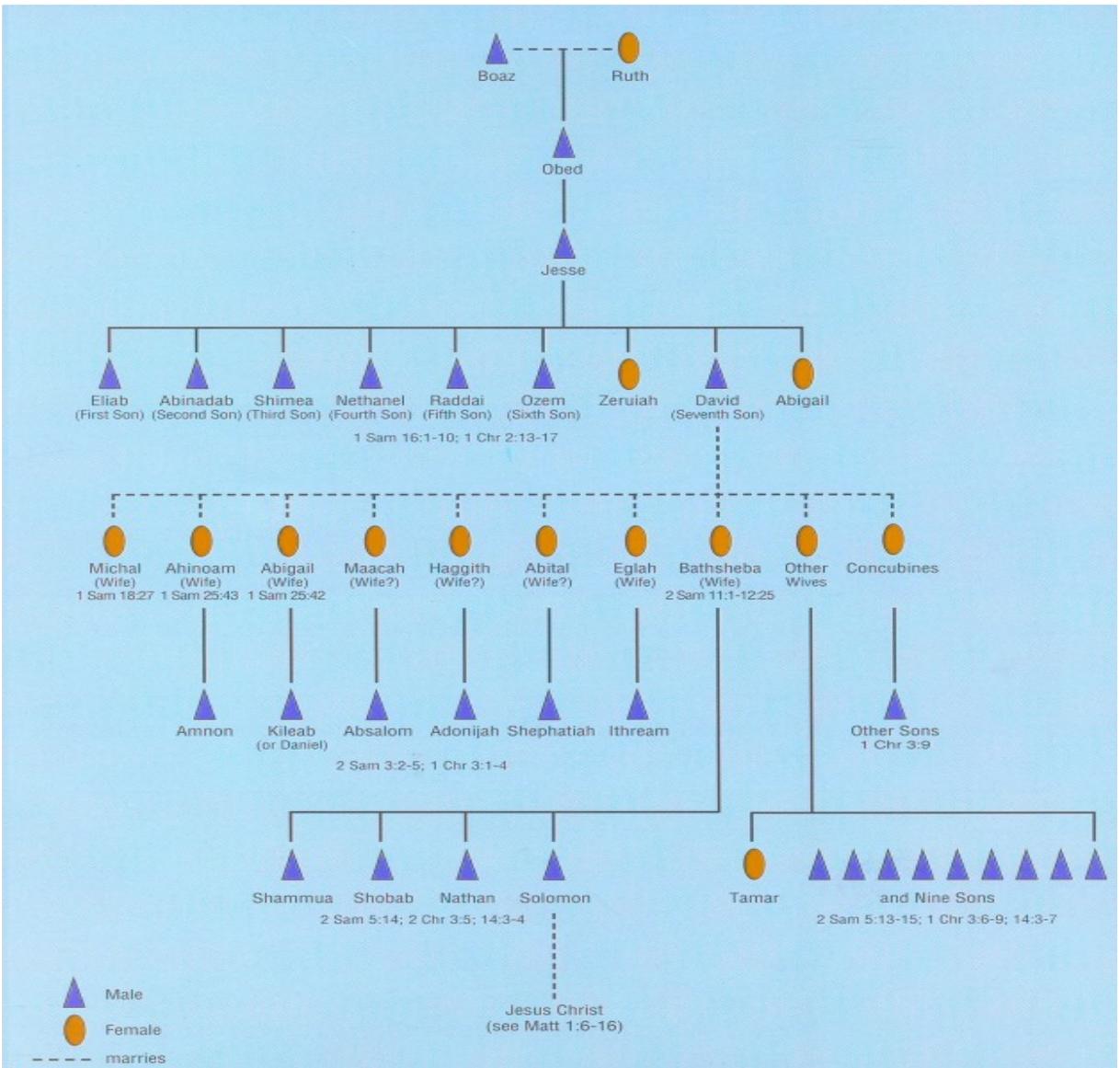
All the calamities [in the story of Ruth] seem to be designed to get a Moabitess into the genealogy of Jesus. Ruth is one of the four women mentioned in Matthew's genealogy (Matthew 1:5). God pursued her. He turned the world upside down, you might say, to include

Ruth in the lineage of his Son.

Surely this is significant for us. Does it not mean that God's blessings are free and undeserved? Ruth was an idolatrous Moabitess before God pursued her (1:15). She did not merit this pursuit. It was free. That is the way God pursues you and me. "You did not choose me, but I chose you" (John 15:16).

Not only that, but God moved the world in order to include a foreigner in the lineage of the Messiah. Ruth was not a Jew. Is not God showing us that his heart is for the nations—all the nations? The glory of Christ is that he comes from the nations and dies for the nations. His blood was shed for the nations, and the nations' blood ran in his veins. The Jewish high priest prophesied better than he knew in John 11:51–52 "that Jesus would die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad." "You were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation" (Revelation 5:9).

The redeeming work of Christ is free and undeserved. It is intended for every ethnic group on the planet. All ethnocentric and racist impulses are crucified in Christ. That too is what the story of Ruth is about. [Excerpt from *A Sweet and Bitter Providence* (January 2010)]



1:1 EXEGESIS

HEBREW TEXT / INTERLINEAR:

וַיְהִי בַיָּמֵי שְׁפָט הַשְּׁפֹטִים וַיְהִי רָעַב בְּאֶרֶץ וַיֵּלֶךְ אִישׁ מִבֵּית
from Beth- a man and went in the land. there was a famine that when the judges judging/governed in the days And it was
לֶחֶם יְהוּדָה לָגוּר בְּשָׂדֵי מוֹאָב הוּא וְאִשְׁתּוֹ וּשְׁנֵי בָנָיו:
his sons and and his wife he Moab in the fields of to live (in) Judah lehem

ENGLISH TRANSLATION [NASB]:

Now it came about in the days when the judges governed, that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of Bethlehem in Judah went to sojourn in the land of Moab with his wife and his two sons.

CONTEXTUAL, GRAMMATICAL, THEOLOGICAL, APPLICATIONAL ANALYSIS:

Verses 1-2 comprise the first scene of the first act . . .

Now it came about in the days when the judges governed,

וַיְהִי בַיָּמֵי שְׁפָט הַשְּׁפֹטִים

The author gives a definable period: the time of the judges (from the death of Joshua to the appt. of Saul as Israel's first king).

Excursus on the Judges of Israel.

The period of the judges has been and can be summarized with the statement from Judges 21:25:

In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes.

Cf. Joshua 2:10 (this speaks of the grandchildren of the Exodus generation).

Sin Cycles - cf. Judges 2:11-3:11 for an example.

that there was a famine in the land.

וַיְהִי רָעַב בְּאֶרֶץ

There's a relationship between the period of the judges and famine.

The famine isn't just a matter of bad luck. God had appt. the famine as a judgment. Cf. Lev. 26 and Deut. 28.

The famine was localized (not uncommon) as Moab was a relatively short distance away (cf. v. 2).

And a certain man of Bethlehem in Judah went to sojourn in the land of Moab

אִישׁ מִבֵּית לֶחֶם יְהוּדָה לָגוּר בְּשַׂדֵּי מוֹאָב

One man and two locations.

Certain man (v. 2) is Elimelech.

Location 1 = Bethlehem (in Judah). Located about 5 miles south of Jerusalem.

Bethlehem = house of bread. Irony of the famine. No bread in the house of bread. The area of Bethlehem was particularly susceptible to the climate as there was no spring. They relied on cisterns. A drought would devastate the local crops (wheat, barley, olives, grapes).

"in Judah" links the text geographically with Judges 17:7-8:

7 Now there was a young man from Bethlehem in Judah, of the family of Judah, who was a Levite; and he was staying there.⁸ Then the man departed from the city, from Bethlehem in Judah, to stay wherever he might find a place; and as he made his journey, he came to the hill country of Ephraim to the house of Micah.

Location 2 = Moab.

In contrast to Beth. water was plentiful in Moab which also had very rich soil. Localized famine. Elim. fam. would have trav. N. to t/area of Jer. and then taken te Jer. to Jericho road to cross the Jordan at the fords by Jericho. From there the road E. up to Heshbon would connect them to the north-south King's Highway leading through Moab. Approx. 70-100 mi. and 1 week of travel.

MOAB, MOABITES. Moab (Heb. *mô'ab*) was the son of Lot by incestuous union with his eldest daughter (Gn. 19:37). Both the descendants and the land were known as Moab, and the people also as Moabites . . . The core of Moab was the plateau E of the Dead Sea between the wadis Arnon and Zered, though for considerable periods, Moab extended well to the N of the Arnon. The average height of the plateau is 100 m, but it is cut by deep gorges. The Arnon itself divides about 21 km from the Dead Sea and several times more farther E into valleys of diminishing depth, the 'valleys of the Arnon' (Nu. 21:14). The Bible has preserved the names of many Moabite towns (Nu. 21:15, 20; 32:3; Jos. 13:17-20; Is. 15-16; Je. 48:20ff.).

In pre-Exodus times Moab was occupied and had settled villages until about 1850 BC. Lot's descendants found a population already there, and must have intermarried with them to emerge at length as the dominant group who gave their name to the whole population. The four kings from the E invaded Moab and overthrew the people of Shaveh-kiriathaim (Gn. 14:5). Either as a result of this campaign, or due to some cause unknown, Transjordan entered on a period of non-sedentary occupation till just before 1300 BC, when several of the Iron Age kingdoms appeared simultaneously. Moab, like the others, was a highly organized kingdom with good agricultural and pastoral pursuits, splendid buildings, distinctive pottery, and strong fortifications in the shape of small fortresses strategically placed around her boundaries. The Moabites overflowed their main plateau and occupied areas N of the Arnon, destroying the former inhabitants (Dt. 2:10–11, 19–21; cf. Gn. 14:5). These lands were shared with the closely related Ammonites.

Just prior to the Exodus, these lands N of the Arnon were wrested from Moab by Sihon, king of the Amorites. When Israel sought permission to travel along 'the King's Highway' which crossed the plateau, Moab refused (Jdg. 11:17). They may have had commercial contact (Dt. 2:28–29). Moses was forbidden to attack Moab despite their unfriendliness (Dt. 2:9), although Moabites were henceforth to be excluded from Israel (Dt. 23:3–6; Ne. 13:1).

Balak, king of Moab, distressed by the Israelite successes, called for the prophet Balaam to curse Israel now settled across the Arnon (Nu. 22–24; Jos. 24:9).

As Israel prepared to cross the Jordan, they camped in the 'plains of Moab' (Nu. 22:1; Jos. 3:1) and were seduced by Moabite and Midianite women to participate in idolatrous practices (Nu. 25; Ho. 9:10).

In the days of the Judges, Eglon, king of Moab, invaded Israelite lands as far as Jericho and oppressed Israel for 18 years. Ehud the Benjaminite assassinated him (Jdg. 3:12–30). Elimelech of Bethlehem migrated to Moab and his sons married Moabite women, Orpah and Ruth. Ruth later married Boaz and became the ancestress of David (Ru. 4:18–22; Mt. 1:5–16). Saul warred with the Moabites (1 Sa. 14:47) and David lodged his parents there while he was a fugitive (1 Sa. 22:3–4). Later David subdued Moab and set apart many Moabites for death (2 Sa. 8:2, 12; 1 Ch. 18:2, 11). After Solomon's death, Moab broke free, but was subdued by Omri of Israel. (*MESHA, *MOABITE STONE.) Towards the close of Ahab's life Moab began to break free again. Jehoram of Israel sought the help of Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, and the king of Edom to regain Moab, but the campaign was abortive (2 Ki. 1:1; 3:4–27). Later, Jehoshaphat's own land was invaded by a confederacy of Moabites, Ammonites and Edomites, but confusion broke out and the allies attacked one another so that Judah was delivered (2 Ch. 20:1–30).

In the year of Elisha's death, bands of Moabites raided Israel (2 Ki. 13:20). During the latter part of the 8th century BC Moab was subdued by Assyria and compelled to pay tribute (Is. 15–16), but after Assyria fell Moab was free again. Moabites entered Judah in the days of Jehoiakim (2 Ki. 24:2). At the fall of Jerusalem in 587 BC some Jews found refuge in Moab, but returned when Gedaliah became governor (Je. 40:11ff.). Moab was finally subdued by Nebuchadrezzar (Jos., Ant. 10.181) and fell successively under the control of the Persians and

various Arab groups. The Moabites ceased to have independent existence as a nation, though in post-exilic times they were known as a race (Ezr. 9:1; Ne. 13:1, 23). Alexander Jannaeus subdued them in the 2nd century BC (Jos., Ant. 13.374).

In the prophets they are often mentioned and divine judgment pronounced on them (see Is. 15–16; 25:10; Je. 9:26; 25:21; 27:3; Ezk. 25:8–11; Am. 2:1–3; Zp. 2:8–11).

The archaeological story of Moab is slowly being unravelled. Excavation in Jordan has not proceeded as rapidly as it has in areas to the W of the Jordan, although in recent decades the programme has been increased. Important sites which have yielded significant results are Dibon, Aroer, Bab edh-Dhra and several sites in the area of the Lisan.

Our knowledge of Moab in early archaeological periods has been greatly expanded with new information about the transition between the Chalcolithic and the Early Bronze Age and the later transition between the Early and Middle Bronze Ages. At Bab edh-Dhra a vast cemetery of the Early Bronze Age has provided material from EB I to EB IV. The excavations at Aroer have given support to the theory that much of Moab was unoccupied during the greater part of the 2nd millennium. This site and the site of Dibon were typical of important Iron Age walled settlements contemporary with the period of the kings of Israel. At Dibon the important *MOABITE (or Mesha) Stone was discovered. Sedentary life in these sites declined from the end of the 6th century BC down to the end of the 4th century. j.a.t. (1996). Moab, Moabites. In D. R. W. Wood, I. H. Marshall, A. R. Millard, J. I. Packer & D. J. Wiseman (Eds.), *New Bible dictionary* (D. R. W. Wood, I. H. Marshall, A. R. Millard, J. I. Packer & D. J. Wiseman, Ed.) (3rd ed.) (775–777). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

with his wife and his two sons.

הָיָא וְאִשְׁתּוֹ וּשְׁנֵי בָנָיו:

Note how no names are given at this point. Narrative works from the general to the specific. Like saying, "There once was a man who lived with his family in a large home in a forest." *Once upon a time* motif.

1:2 EXEGESIS

HEBREW TEXT / INTERLINEAR:

וְשֵׁם הָאִישׁ אֱלִימֶלֶךְ וְשֵׁם אִשְׁתּוֹ נְעֻמִי וְשֵׁם שְׁנֵי-בָנָיו | מַחְלֹן
Mahlon his sons two and the name of Naomi his wife and the name of (was) Elimelech the man And the name of
וְכִלְיוֹן אֶפְרַתִּים מִבֵּית לֶחֶם יְהוּדָה וַיָּבֹאוּ שְׂדֵי-מוֹאָב
to the fields of Moab And they came (in) Judah. lehem from Beth- Ephrathites and Chilion
וַיֵּהְיוּ-שָׁם:
there and stayed

ENGLISH TRANSLATION [NASB]:

And the name of the man was Elimelech, and the name of his wife, Naomi; and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion, Ephrathites of Bethlehem in Judah. Now they entered the land of Moab and remained there.

CONTEXTUAL, GRAMMATICAL, THEOLOGICAL, APPLICATIONAL ANALYSIS:

And the name of the man was Elimelech, and the name of his wife, Naomi;

וְשֵׁם הָאִישׁ אֱלִימֶלֶךְ וְשֵׁם אִשְׁתּוֹ נְעֻמִי

Elimelech = My God the king. God is king.

Naomi = Pleasant; agreeable.

and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion,

וְשֵׁם שְׁנֵי-בָנָיו | מַחְלֹן וְכִלְיוֹן

Mahlon is of uncertain origin. May be a derived from a Heb. word meaning "to be sick." If so it's related to Chilion which means "to come to an end, mortality, frailty."

These names may be termed "nomen omen" (ominous names, cf. "Dracula").

Ephrathites of Bethlehem in Judah.

אַפְרַתִּים מִבֵּית לֶחֶם יְהוּדָה

Ephrathite could refer to a geog. district or a clan ancestor.

EPHRATAH — fruitful. (1.) The second wife of Caleb, the son of Hezron, mother of Hur, and grandmother of Caleb, who was one of those that were sent to spy the land (1 Chr. 2:19, 50). (2.) The ancient name of Bethlehem in Judah (Gen. 35:16, 19; 48:7). In Ruth 1:2 it is called “Bethlehem-Judah,” but the inhabitants are called “Ephrathites;” in Micah 5:2, “Bethlehem-Ephratah;” in Matt. 2:6, “Bethlehem in the land of Judah.” In Ps. 132:6 it is mentioned as the place where David spent his youth, and where he heard much of the ark, although he never saw it till he found it long afterwards at Kirjath-jearim; i.e., the “city of the wood,” or the “forest-town” (1 Sam. 7:1; comp. 2 Sam. 6:3, 4).

EPHRATHITE — a citizen of Ephratah, the old name of Bethlehem (Ruth 1:2; 1 Sam. 17:12), or Bethlehem-Judah. [Easton, M. G. (1996). Easton’s Bible dictionary. Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.]

Now they entered the land of Moab and remained there.

וַיָּבֹאוּ שְׂרַי-מוֹאָב וַיְהִיוּ-שָׁם:

"The syntax of these two verses suggests that the initiative for the trip to Moab was Elimelech's and the participation of his wife and sons a secondary issue." [Block, 625]

"remained" = lit. "sojourned" = temp. stay.

Elimelech's move parallels that of Abraham who sojourned in the land of Egypt due to famine (Gen. 12). Elimelech's motive is uncertain. Faith or selfishness?

The Moabites were despised for at least 5 reasons:

- 1) They were the product of incest (Gen. 19);
- 2) they wouldn't allow the Israelites to pass through their land when they came out of Egypt - Balak and Balaam (Num. 22-24);
- 3) the Moabite women seduced the Israelite men and the Israelites were later punished (Num. 25);
- 4) Israel constitutionally excluded Moab from the Lord's assembly according to Deut. 23;
- 5) Eglon, the Moabite King, had recently oppressed Israel (Judges 3:15ff).