

The Relative Place of the Ruth Story in Time

ABSTRACT: This article analyzing the Biblical information presents evidence that the story of Ruth occurred early during the Judges period probably during and following the Mesopotamian oppression.

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The story of Ruth takes place early in the period of the judges. It probably starts during the period when Cushan-Rishathaim, king of Mesopotamia controls Israel and ends early in the judgeship of Othniel. The time of the occurrence of the story of Ruth is clear, first, because the mother of Boaz was Rahab the Harlot¹ who defected to Israel in the time of Joshua.²

Second, because Ruth was a Moabitess and ancestor of David. Now descendants of a Moabite were forbidden to enter the congregation of Yahweh even to the tenth generation forever.³ This says that a descendent of a Moabite at any time must have at least ten generations separating him before he may be counted as a member of the congregation of Yahweh. The fact that God selected David to be king over Israel,⁴ that Israel was the congregation of Yahweh,⁵ and that David was numbered with the congregation of Yahweh;⁶ indicates that David was a member of the congregation of Yahweh, therefore there were at least ten generations between Ruth and David. This is a fitting number because nearly 300 years would separate them if one counts a generation as 25 years. Note that the term father as used in Ruth 4:17 also can indicate ancestor so there are at least eight missing entries in the genealogy between Obed and Jesse. From this, it can be determined that the Ruth story occurred early during the period of the judges. A speculative possibility is that the congregation of Yahweh refers to the Israelites and those who do not qualify because of descent are not listed in certain genealogies. In this case then ten generations would be missing from the record and there would be twelve generations separating Ruth and David. This also might explain why three additional generations are missing in the genealogy of Matthew 1 between Jehoram and Uzziah. This suggests that king Ahaziah was either the son of an Edomite or an Egyptian, because descendants of these nations were not allowed to be members of the congregation of Yahweh for three generations.⁷ It also explains why Rehoboam was rejected as king by God, he was the son of an Ammonite therefore Jeroboam was selected as king. (Note: more than ten generations passed in Judah before Israel ceased to be a nation).

Third, the Hebrew cannon at the time of Josephus must have counted the Ruth story as part of the book of Judges. In the end of Judges there are three stories that date from the early period of the judges and the story of Ruth would fit in well here.

Fourth, the story occurred during a famine, now Leon Wood says that, "A famine worse in Judah than in Moab is rare."⁸ This famine was likely not due to weather, but to the tribute exacted and by crop destruction done by the controlling king. In Judges 3:15 Ehud is bringing the tribute to the king of Moab. A regular destruction of the crop would let the land rest as required in the law for Sabbath and Jubilee rests. In Judges 6:3-4 a famine was created by the Midianites, the Amalekites (earlier one of Eglon's allies in the attack) and the children of the east destroying crops so this could easily have happened at the earlier date. This passage refers to a famine during Gideon's time and it is not likely that it is the famine referred to in Ruth because a later famine would squeeze the time period even more.

Fifth, Boaz comments that Ruth has not run after younger men and he refers to her as daughter.⁹ This would be an appropriate comment for a man of Boaz' age, for he would be about fifty now, if he were born in

¹ Matthew 1:6.

² Joshua 6:23.

³ Deuteronomy 23:3.

⁴ 1 Samuel 16:12.

⁵ 1 Chronicles 28:8.

⁶ 1 Chronicles 13:2.

⁷ Deuteronomy 23:7-8.

⁸ Wood, Distressing Days of the Judges, p. 255.

⁹ Ruth 3:10.

the first year of planting after the conquest of the land. Or between 40 and 60 years old, if Rahab, his mother, was 20 at the time of the fall of Jericho, and could bear children until she was 40.

Finally, this great length of time makes the explanation for the custom of transferring the shoe in Ruth 4:7 necessary because of the length of time this custom had been out of use.¹⁰ With this evidence, a considerable period of time, 300 or more years may easily have elapsed between Ruth and David.

¹⁰ C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 & 2 Samuel, 2:469.