

Bible Month: Ruth 1

It is not known exactly when the book was written. However, one possibility is that it is a parable about the need for inclusivity towards foreigners that was written at the time of Ezra and Nehemiah when intermarriage was controversial.

Some commentators emphasise that Elimelech disobeyed God when he went to Moab and this led to further disobedience when his two sons married Moabite women (see Deuteronomy 7:1-4, Deuteronomy 23: 3-6, Ezra 9: 1-2, Nehemiah 13: 1-3 and 23-27). However, there is no implied criticism in the book of his action in seeking to take care of his family during a time of famine.

We do not know what the tradition was in Moab. In some cultural traditions it is the custom for a widow to return to her own family after her husband dies, whereas in the Jewish tradition the dead man's brother was expected to marry her. Was Ruth going against the traditions of Moabite society when she chose to stay with Naomi?

Michael's reflection suggests that there is no evidence that Ruth prayed. I wonder if her vow to Naomi in verse 17 can be regarded as a form of prayer?

...a sort of inverse blessing. Interesting that Ruth invoked Yahweh (Naomi's God) in making this vow.

The other prayers in the book of Ruth are all blessings.

Whereas “Your God will be my God” in verse 16 might imply polytheism, Ruth’s invocation of the LORD (Yahweh) in verse 17 does suggest that she had rejected the Moabite gods to follow the God of Israel.

How does the book of Ruth fit into the Jewish scriptures?

Rabbinic Judaism recognises 24 books. This collection is called the *Tanakh* – an acronym made from the three groupings of books: *Torah* (Teaching), *Nevi'im* (Prophets) and *Ketuvim* (Writings). The book of Ruth is part of the *Ketuvim*, which comprises eleven books, also including the Psalms, Proverbs and Job. Christian tradition has regarded Ruth as one of the historical books of the Bible. Jewish tradition places it with the ‘Writings’ that Christians class as wisdom.

Perhaps there is a similarity with the book of Job. Like Job, Naomi lost everything.

It is similar but without the theological discussion that Job had with his friends.