

Equip: Resources on the Book of Ruth

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The Book of Ruth is a concise and captivating tale of a journey from devastation to redemption in God's sovereign and loving plan. Despite its succinctness, Ruth abounds with a rich theological message for its readers.

Its ability to find hope amid bitter loss makes the story inspirational to the wandering soul. The tale's joyful resolution makes for a pleasant respite when read after the Book of Judges, its neighbor in the Christian canon.

Increasingly, the Book of Ruth has become a favorite lecture to teach to my students at Houston Christian University. The young men and women in my classes are easily able to connect with the plight of Naomi as she struggles with the anxiety of grief, homelessness, poverty and a desperate outlook for her future.

I find students to be reflective when they learn Boaz's heroism derives from his willingness to adhere to God's law as he provides for the poor and redeems his kinsman.

Most importantly, students enjoy making the connection that Ruth's fulfilling path, which culminates in the genealogical line to monarchy and Messiah, begins with her loving confession that, "Your God will be my God" (Ruth 1:16).

Common debates

Before reviewing biblical commentaries and resources on Ruth, it may be helpful to note some of the common debates on the book.

First, the book's date of authorship is difficult to decipher. Therefore, theories on dating are vigorously debated. Two main schools of thought have developed. Some scholars give the book an "early" date between the reigns of David and Josiah. While other scholars prefer a "later" post-exilic date.

Second, scholars are split on the author's purpose for writing the book. This debate coincides with the debate on dating. Those preferring an early date tend to see the author's purpose deriving from their support for David's monarchy. Those favoring the later date tend to argue for the book as a response to the perceived ethnocentric policies of post-exile Judah.

While some commentaries take a neutral approach to these questions, many do not. Additionally, there exists an abundant amount of scholarship focusing on Ruth as a woman.

All these approaches impact the textual interpretations of their commentaries. Mindful consideration should be employed when utilizing resources with incongruent points of view.

***The Zondervan Exegetical Commentary: Ruth* by Daniel I. Block**

The *Zondervan Exegetical Commentary* is a thorough resource for Ruth scholarship. Designed for sermon writers, it is clearly a strong academic work that does not abandon a sense of accessibility.

Textual explanations and background context provide the reader with clarity. Getting the biblical Hebrew correct is rightly a priority for Block. Therefore, the *Zondervan Exegetical Commentary* on Ruth provides Block's own English translation of the original Hebrew.

Block argues for an earlier date of authorship. While admitting his view is

not in the majority of critical scholars, he bolsters his position by keenly displaying the contradictions in other dating points of view. The cordial way he challenges other theories is refreshing.

Ministry professionals will appreciate the sections on theological messaging and the links to other biblical texts. These sections will help the sermon writer in displaying Ruth's place in the metanarrative of Scripture.

Block supplies a verse-by-verse commentary on the book and wraps up his work with a script for a dramatic retelling of the story, complete with stage direction and costume suggestions.

***Eerdmans Classic Biblical* *Commentaries: Ruth* by Robert L. Hubbard Jr.**

Originally released in 1989, this commentary has stood the test of time. Scholars of varied backgrounds find insights in Hubbard's commentary. The continued popularity of this award-winning commentary led to its paperback re-release in 2023.

Hubbard is open to female authorship of the book and advocates for an authorship theory motivated by the defense of the Davidic monarchy. He arrives at this position based on his interpretation of the narrative.

Some scholars note Hubbard's sensitivity to the predicaments of Naomi and Ruth.

Other Common Commentaries

The NIV Application Commentary: Judges and Ruth by K. Lawson Younger Jr. is a good commentary with a slightly heavier focus on contemporary

application.

Word Biblical Commentary, Volume 9: Ruth, Esther by Frederic Bush often is used by my students and is a solid commentary that always points students in the right direction.

The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary, Volume II by Leander E. Keck is a fine commentary, but does endorse more parable than historical view of Ruth.

Other Scholarly Resources

***Ruth: A Continental Commentary* by Andre LaCocque**

While not a personal recommendation, if one favors the later date of Ruth's authorship, this commentary may be of value.

LaCocque gives a full-thoughted defense of his view that the Book of Ruth is a direct response to the alleged xenophobia of the restrictive marriage practices in Judah during the post-exilic era. He displays little patience for points of view that he sees as untenable.

If only considering citations by other academics, LaCocque's work is perhaps the most-cited book on this list.

***Ruth: A Handbook on the Hebrew Text* by Robert D. Holmstedt**

This book is a deep dive into the Hebrew linguistics. It is highly scholarly and may not be of interest to the casual reader.

Free Online Resources

[Asbury Bible Commentary](#) by Zondervan, [Enduring Word Bible Commentary](#) by David Guzik, [Biblehub Commentaries](#) and [Blue Letter Bible Commentaries](#) are good online resources.

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