

HEARING THE WORD



NIGEL BARGE

Ruth
Workbook

Hearing the Word Ruth Workbook

Web Edition

Copyright © Nigel Barge, 2009 – 2026

Loch Fyne, Argyll, Scotland, UK

Email: info@hearingtheword.org.uk

Website: <https://hearingtheword.org.uk>

Nigel Barge has asserted his moral right under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988, to be identified as the author of this work. All rights reserved. Unless otherwise indicated, its contents are licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Non Commercial-No Derivatives 4.0 International Licence](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/) (CC BY-NC-ND)

This licence allows readers to download the text by Nigel Barge and share it with others, so long as they credit the author, but they can't change it in any way or use it commercially.

To view the terms of the Licence in simplified form, follow this link:

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/6.0/?ref=chooser-v1>

It provides a further link to the actual licence in legal terms.

Acknowledgements

I am very grateful to Phil and June Malloch, whose tireless editing, reviewing and pulling together of materials has enabled the *Hearing the Word* resource to be shared with the wider church.

Nigel Barge, July 2026

Scripture Quotations marked (NIV) are from

The Holy Bible, New International Version, Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc®
The International Bible Society. Used by permission of Hodder & Stoughton Ltd.

A member of the Hodder Headline Plc Group. All rights reserved

“NIV” is a registered trademark of International Bible Society. UK trademark number 1448790

Scripture Quotations marked (ESV) are from

The ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version ®) published by HarperCollinsPublishers,
© 2001 by Crossway. Anglicized edition, © 2002, HarperCollinsPublisher.

Used by permission. All rights reserved.

The ‘ESV’ and ‘English Standard Version’ are registered trademarks of Crossway.

Resources

The New Bible Dictionary 3rd edition published by Inter Varsity Press

The New Bible Commentary 21st century edition, IVP. A commentary on every Bible book

www.blueletterbible.org

Table of Contents

Hearing the Word: A Tool for Bible reading	3
Sharing the Word.....	4
Reading Narrative	5
Background to the Book of Ruth.....	6
Study 1 Ruth 1:1-22.....	7
Be wholehearted for God and His people	7
Study 2 Ruth 2:1-23.....	8
Obey authority and trust the Lord to repay	8
Study 3 Ruth 3:1-18.....	9
Ruth and Boaz at the threshing floor	9
Study 4 Ruth 4:1-18.....	10
Boaz marries Ruth	10

Hearing the Word: A Tool for Bible reading

Here is a pattern you may use to study a passage of the Bible. It helps if you then write down your own questions and answers in a notebook.



LOOK – What does it *say*?

The Text

What questions does it raise -

- *Who, What, When, Where, Why, how?*

What surprises you?

The Context?

the surrounding text

the Book of the Bible

the whole Bible

the place in the Bible Story



LEARN – What does it *mean*?

What type of writing is it?

Answer the questions

Summarise the passage



LISTEN – What is the *message*?

Which is the **Main Point**?

Which is the **Key Verse**?



LIVE – What is the *response*?

What does it show *about God*, (character, grace*, Jesus**)?

from the **KV / MP** ?

from the rest of the passage?

What should be done,

from the **KV / MP**, by original hearers /me, today?

from the rest of the passage?

* God's undeserved generosity is evident throughout the Bible; it is perfectly expressed in Jesus.

** The Bible, from 'the Fall' onwards, describes God's plan of salvation through his Son. Thus, *all* the Scriptures speak in some way of Jesus (Luke 24:27).

Sharing the Word

After carefully reading a passage of the Bible, and using the HtW Tool (p4) yourself, here is a pattern you might use *to share your thoughts with others*.

Preparing for a group

Time put in beforehand will *greatly benefit* time together.

Work through the stages – LOOK, LEARN, LISTEN, LIVE.

Write down your thoughts.

Format

- LOOK & LEARN } **Go verse by verse** – Invite **short, direct** questions –
(Who, What, When, Where, Why, hoW?)
whether answers known or not. Answer each in turn.
Look for other Bible parts that might be relevant.
- LEARN } Pay attention to anything that puzzles.
- LISTEN – Share views on the Main Point and a Key Verse.
- LIVE – Respond
What does it show of God / His grace/Jesus
What should be done, by first hearers/by me, today?
- NB Be sure to leave **adequate time** for the **LIVE** section..

Operation

As you gather round God's Word together:

- listen to the views of others.
- welcome new people. (All can join in when you start with simple questions, whether you know the answer or not.)
- encourage people to think for themselves. (Don't let the knowledgeable dominate or rehearse sermons past!)
- include all who might wish to, in your sharing together.

Growth

The goal is to **Share** the Word. Discuss soon who might join you, particularly those outwith the church. When your group grows to about 5, plan to divide. (see: Sharing the Word – 'Meristems').

Reading Narrative

In seeking to hear the Word of God throughout the Bible, we need to take into account the *type of literature* in which each part is written. Ruth is mainly *narrative* (story), the most common type. To approach narrative correctly we need to keep these principles in mind:

1 In General: It is *God's* story

The whole Bible recounts the story of God's dealings with humankind. After creation and the fall in Genesis, the rest describes how God works out his unfolding plan of salvation for humanity in Jesus. The OT prepares for the arrival, life, death and resurrection of Jesus. The NT recounts these and looks forwards to His return at the end of time. It is *all* about Jesus. Therefore:

a) Every part relates to Him (Luke 24:27; John 5:39).

So as we read, we should be asking – 'what does this show about Jesus? What is *He* doing?'

b) Everything is relevant.

In a movie, every scene plays some part in the overall story. Often, we are shown things in the early stages that make no sense until later. The Bible is the same. So, as we read Bible narrative – knowing how it ends – we should be asking 'what relevance has *this* part of the story to the *main* story?'

2 In particular: 'Follow the camera angle.'

A film director focuses the viewer's attention on particular shots to tell 'his story'. In the same way each narrator in the Bible is selective about what to tell us. They leave out much general detail, only giving us what is relevant to what they are trying to convey.

As we read, we should therefore be asking the question, 'Why is he telling me this, and in this particular way?'

3 Warts and all

Human beings often get things wrong. The Bible narrative faithfully records errors, even by people who are elsewhere commended. For instance, Moses murdered a man, King David committed adultery, and Peter, who was praised one minute for realising Jesus was the Christ, was minutes later roundly scolded when he tried to stop Jesus being the Christ through suffering! (Exodus 2:12; 2 Samuel 11; Matthew 16:16-23)

So, we can't treat every thought or action in a narrative as something to copy, just because 'it's in the Bible'. We must ask the Holy Spirit to use the rest of Scripture to discern good examples to follow, and bad ones to avoid.

Background to the Book of Ruth

The Author

The book contains no clue to its author.

Historical setting

Before Moses died, the Lord allowed him to *see* Canaan, the Promised Land, from a hilltop, even though he was not allowed to *enter* it (Deuteronomy 34). After Moses' death, **Joshua** became the leader and led the people in the conquest of Canaan (c.1230BC). When Joshua in turn died, there was a period of disorganisation, tribal discord and defeat.

The book of **Judges** tells how God '*raised up judges who saved them.*' (Judges 2:16) Unlike our present meaning, the word 'Judge' is used of people who were rulers in peace time, and leaders in battle. The final line of Judges says: "*In those days, Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit.*" (21:25)

The book of **Ruth** is set within this period (1:1) – when Israel was disobedient, selfish and idolatrous. If the famine (1:1) was a judgment from God on the land, it might have been in response to this disobedience. Elimelech's move to Moab may have seemed right to him at the time – but it did not avert calamity.

Moab

Abraham had a nephew, Lot. Lot had a son, Moab, by one of his own daughters (Genesis 19:30-38). The Moabites were related to, but *not of the line of*, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the people of the Promise. They worshipped the god Chemish. Moab was 'next door' to Judah, east of the Dead Sea, which is about 10 miles wide. Perhaps Elimelech travelled only 50 to 100 miles to escape the famine.

Date of writing

Leon Morris writes, "In view of the lack of firm evidence, it is impossible to be dogmatic. But the language, the acquaintance with early customs, and the general atmosphere of the book seem to show that a date during the early reign of the Kings probably best satisfies the conditions. It is difficult to be more precise." (Tyndale Old Testament, Commentaries: Judges and Ruth, 1968)

Its purpose

Why was this beautiful love story recognised as part of Scripture? Primarily it shows how God is active throughout it, and through the whole Bible story.

At the time, it provided a family tree for King David, the greatest of the Hebrew kings, which does not appear in the books of Samuel. (4:17ff). Looking through a New Testament lens, however, Christians also see it as part of the ancestry of Jesus, great David's Greater Son. It shows us God's divine purpose of redemption in the world, involving Ruth, a Moabitess – an outsider – in the line of promise which stretches from Adam to Christ.

Study 1

Ruth 1:1-22

Be wholehearted for God and His people

Background

Palestine has a rather uncertain rainfall, so times of drought are not uncommon. (see *famine* below). Conditions can vary widely over comparatively small areas.

Word List

1	<i>ruled</i>	traditionally <i>judged</i>
	<i>land</i>	<i>ie</i> Canaan, the land God had promised to Abraham
	<i>sojourn</i> (ESV)	live for a while (NIV,) <i>ie</i> Elimelech planned to return
	<i>Bethlehem</i>	<i>lit</i> 'house of bread' <i>ie</i> granary
2	<i>Elimelech</i>	means, God is King or My God is King
	<i>Naomi</i>	means pleasant, lovely, delightful
	<i>Mahlon</i>	possibly from a root meaning 'to be weak' or 'sick'
	<i>Chilion</i>	possibly 'failing' or 'pining'
	<i>Ephrathites</i>	Ephrath or Ephrathah was an earlier name for Bethlehem
6	<i>arose</i>	indicates start of an action, especially a journey
	<i>Fields of Moab</i> (ESV)	just means <i>the country of Moab</i> (NIV: <i>Moab</i>)
	<i>visited</i>	word used in OT to describe divine activity
8, 21, 22	<i>the LORD</i>	YAHWEH, the personal name of the God of Israel
	<i>kindness</i>	incudes thought of faithfulness, steadfastness
1, 9	<i>wept aloud</i>	the traditional Eastern expression of grief
13	<i>God's hand</i>	a way of speaking of God's activity
15	<i>her people</i>	<i>ie</i> her nation, Moab
20	<i>Mara</i>	means bitter
	<i>Almighty</i>	Hebrew <i>Shaddai</i> ; emphasis is on God's great power, sometimes including severity of God <i>eg</i> Is. 13:6 Joel 1:15
22	<i>barley harvest</i>	<i>ie</i> towards the end of April

Bible Connections

1	<i>famine</i>	<i>see eg</i> Genesis 12:10; 26:1; 41:56; 2 Samuel 21:1, 1 Kings 18:2, 2 Kings 6:25
11	<i>levirate marriage</i>	<i>see</i> Deuteronomy 25:5ff; Genesis 38:5-10
20	<i>bitter water</i>	<i>see</i> Exodus 15:22-27
21	<i>Almighty</i>	<i>see</i> Genesis 17:1; 35:11; Exodus 6:3, Psalm 68:14, 91:1ff

Obey authority and trust the Lord to repay

Background

In ancient Palestine there were not many ways open to widows to make a living. **Gleaning** was one possibility. Provision for the poor was laid down in the laws given to Moses. A man must not reap to the very border of his field, nor pick up what was left after the reapers had been through (Leviticus 19:9) nor go back for a sheaf he had overlooked. (Deuteronomy 24:19) Instead, the poor could come and pick up what was left. (That was gleaning). There would be one common field outside a village with people owning parts of it.

Kinsman-redeemer. In Leviticus, family relationship involves a variety of duties *eg* redeem a relation from slavery (25:48f), redeem a relative's field (25:25).

A regulation in Deuteronomy 25:5-10 says that if a man dies childless then his next of kin should marry the widow and have a child who would be regarded as the child of the dead man and carry on his name. This was 'levirate' marriage.

Word List

- | | | |
|----|-------------------------------|--|
| 1 | <i>Boaz</i> | Meaning not certain, may have idea of quickness/strength,. Son of Rahab the prostitute (Josh 2:1; Matt 1:5) |
| | <i>land</i> | <i>ie</i> Canaan, the promised land |
| | <i>Elimelech</i> | Ruth's late father-in-law |
| 5 | <i>"Whose young woman..."</i> | Boaz assumes Ruth is someone's servant. |
| 8 | <i>do not go</i> | The Hebrew is emphatic |
| 10 | <i>bowed down...</i> | Token of humility and gratitude |
| 11 | <i>native land/ homeland</i> | Land of your kindred; there is a strong family sense. |
| 12 | <i>reward</i> | Hebrew denotes 'wages' |
| | <i>under whose wings</i> | Denotes trust and security |
| 17 | <i>ephah</i> | About 22 litres/4 gallons |
| 20 | <i>kinsman-redeemer</i> | Hebrew <i>goel</i> |
| 22 | <i>my daughter</i> | A term of addressing someone (2:2,8,22; 3:1,10,11,16,18) used only once elsewhere, by Jephthah in Judges 11:35 |
| 23 | <i>wheat harvest</i> | After the barley harvest (1:22). From the beginning of barley harvest to end of wheat harvest is about 2 months. |

Bible Connections

- | | | |
|----|------------------------------|--|
| 2 | <i>gleaning</i> | <i>see</i> Leviticus 19:9; Deuteronomy 24:19 |
| 12 | <i>under God's wings</i> | <i>see</i> Psalm 17:8; 36:7; 63:7 |
| | <i>Jesus as our Redeemer</i> | <i>see</i> Ephesians 1:7; Rom 3:24f; Galatians 3:13; 5:1 |

Ruth and Boaz at the threshing floor

Background

We have very little knowledge of customs prevalent in Israel in antiquity. `We do not know if the way it was done here was a widely practised custom or not.

After harvest, grain was separated from its husks by being trodden on by animals, usually pulling a ‘threshing sledge’ made of wood with nails protruding from the underside. Then it was *winnowed*, *i.e.* the mixture was thrown into the air during a stiff breeze; the wind blew the chaff away and the grain, being heavier, fell more or less straight down. Threshing floors were usually situated in exposed places to catch the breeze. (Unusually, Gideon winnowed hidden in the hollow of his wine press, lest marauding Midianites see him and steal his crop, Judges 6:11.)

At harvest time people would camp out, perhaps to guard the crop.

v10-11 indicate Ruth had become well known in the town and gained a good reputation.

Kinsman-redeemer. See Background in Study 2

Word list

- 1 *home* (NIV) / *rest* (ESV) has sense of “settled in life”
- 2 *tonight* probably evening
- 3 *wash* probably bathe oneself
Perfume (NIV) / *anoint* (ESV) similar meaning
best clothes (NIV) / *cloak* (ESV) probably a large cloak to cover her
- 7 *quietly* (NIV) / *softly* (ESV) not secretly but ‘so as not to be heard’
- 9 *corner of your garment* (NIV) / *wings* (ESV) can mean both, but more commonly used for wings *cf* 2:12
- 15 *measure* particular measure not stated, obviously substantial
He went (NIV) probably scribal error, clearly means *she went* as in ESV

Bible connections

- 9 ‘Spreading skirt/corner of garment’ over a woman is used as a metaphor for marriage in Ezekiel 16:8.
- 15 Six measures – one short of God’s perfect seven (Genesis 2:1-3)

Boaz marries Ruth

Background

Excavations show that houses in Palestinian cities were generally built very closely together. There were no large open spaces like the Roman *forum* or the Greek *agora*. Instead, room was found at the city gate, so the gate became the centre of city life. Any important assembly happened there (1 Kings 22:10; Jeremiah 38:7). It was the place for formal, legal business (2 Samuel 15:2; Amos 5:10,12,15, (AV, ESV ‘in the gate’; NIV translates ‘in the courts’). Informally, it was where people gathered socially.

If a man died childless and his brother refused to marry the widow, Deuteronomy 25:7 told the woman to ‘go to the elders at the town gate’ to begin the process of public humiliation of the offender.

It is not clear how Naomi had rights of ownership over her late husband Elimelech’s piece of land. Jeremiah 32:6-12 seems to show that land for sale would normally be offered to a member of the family before anyone else. (*That* particular transaction happened not at the city gate, but in the courtyard of the guard of the royal palace (Jeremiah 32:2) since Jeremiah was imprisoned there!)

The genealogy at the end of the chapter covers about 640 years but only has ten names so it is likely the list is somewhat compressed with some names omitted.

Word List

- | | | |
|----|---|---|
| 1 | <i>town gate</i> | see above |
| | <i>‘friend’</i> | unique in OT to call another ‘friend’ |
| | <i>Come over here</i> (NIV)/ <i>Turn aside</i> (ESV) | He wants a serious conversation |
| 2 | <i>ten of the elders</i> | There is no information on significance of ‘10’; elders exercised a judicial function. |
| 3 | <i>brother</i> | Term is not confined to immediate family relationships |
| 4 | <i>I cannot redeem</i> | This is strong language |
| 5 | <i>acquire</i> | The dead man’s widow is part of the redemption: her son would eventually inherit the field. |
| 11 | <i>Rachel and Leah</i> | Wives of Jacob, mothers of his 12 sons <i>see</i> Gen 29:14-28 |
| | <i>have standing</i> (NIV)/ <i>act worthily</i> (ESV) | Very unusual word. Same root as worthy (2:1; 3:11), general excellence, wealth |
| 12 | <i>Perez</i> | Son of Jacob’s son Judah, ancestor of Boaz <i>see</i> Gen 46:12 |
| | <i>Tamar</i> | Mother of Perez <i>see</i> Genesis 38 |

- 14 *Blessed be the Lord* Usual way of expressing thankfulness
- 17 *Obed* Means ‘servant’; vv18-22 show him to be the grandfather of David, Israel’s greatest earthly king
- 20 *Salmon* Married Rahab, (previously the prostitute from Jericho who hid the Israelite spies.) *see* Joshua 2; Matthew 1:5

Bible Connection

- 18 *genealogy of king David* *see* fuller information in 1 Chronicles 2:4-15
- Jesus as our Redeemer* *see* Ephesians 1:7; Rom 3:24f; Galatians 3:13; 5:1

“I can read the Bible for myself!”

To show that the Bible is accessible to all,
the Rev Nigel Barge, formerly minister of Torrance Parish Church,
devised a tool called ‘Hearing the Word’.

The Manual explains the basic principles of Bible reading,
teaches them by means of an interactive course,
and practices them on a single passage, Mark 10:35-45,
Participants follow in a Workbook: *Hearing the Word - Introduction*,
which includes the next six passages in Mark,
so they may follow on for themselves.

As the principles apply equally to all, the course will both
instruct the novice and refresh the ‘hardened’ Bible student!

The Manual, is available, free, online.

Hard copies can also be ordered at cost price from Amazon.

Further Study Guides cover various genres of Bible material –
Narrative, Poetry, Law, Letters, Prophecy etc.
To see the materials currently available to download, visit:

Website: <https://hearingtheword.org.uk>

Email: info@hearingtheword.org.uk

Ruth WB 26 1013 Web