



Ruth

Session 5: Understanding Ruth

1. What kind of literature do you think Ruth is?
2. In what ways can you see *Ruth* being a Parable or “teaching story”?
3. In what ways is the book of *Ruth* funny? In what ways might a “pious” or “uptight” reading of the story diminish its point?
4. What can we know about the historical context of the writing of *Ruth*?
5. Why is the historical period of “reconstruction” especially important to understanding *Ruth*?
6. What is the cultural agenda promoted by Ezra?
7. How would you describe the opposing views of reconstruction period Israelites regarding foreigners or outsiders?

8. Where do you see similar disagreements being expressed in today's religion and politics?

9. How might the book of *Ruth* have contributed to the ancient debate? To today's debates?

10. How has your view of the book of *Ruth* changed during the course of this study so far?

11. What are the implications of this session's material for your personal life? Your spiritual journey? For your local faith community?

Bonus Question: In the Christian canon, *Ruth* follows *Judges* in the midst of the "historical" books of the Old Testament. However, in the *Tanakh* (the Jewish Bible), *Ruth* is the first book of a collection called the "Five Scrolls" that follows immediately after the book of *Proverbs*. Each of these "scrolls," *Ruth*, *Song of Songs*, *Ecclesiastes*, *Lamentations* and *Esther*, is read as part of a particular festival celebration. *Ruth* is read for the annual celebration of the grain harvest and the Torah called Shavuot (also called Pentecost or the Feast of Weeks). How might *Ruth's* context in the *Tanakh* suggest a different understanding of *Ruth* than is suggested in its "Christian" context?

