



The Gospel of Ruth: Loving God Enough to Break the Rules

Carolyn Custis James

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This isn't the Ruth, the Naomi, or the Boaz we thought we knew. Carolyn James has unearthed startling new insights from this well-worn story ... insights that have life-changing implications for you. Naomi is no longer regarded as a bitter, complaining woman, but as a courageous overcomer. A Female Job. Ruth (typically admired for her devotion to Naomi and her deference to Boaz) turns out to be a gutsy risk-taker and a powerful agent for change among God's people. She lives outside the box, and her love for Yahweh and Naomi compels her to break the rules of social and religious convention at nearly every turn. Boaz, the Kinsman Redeemer, is repeatedly caught off-guard by Ruth's initiatives. His partnership with her models the kind of male/female relationships that the gospel intends for all who follow Jesus. Carolyn James drills down deeper into the story where she uncovers in the Old Testament the same passionate, counter-cultural, rule-breaking gospel that Jesus modeled and taught his followers to pursue. Within this age-old story is a map to radical levels of love and sacrifice, combined with the message that God is counting on his daughters to build his kingdom. The Gospel of Ruth vests every woman's life with kingdom purposes and frees us to embrace wholeheartedly God's calling, regardless of our circumstances or season of life. This story of two women who have lost everything contains a profound message: God created women not to live in the shadowy margins of men or of the past, but to emerge as courageous activists for his kingdom.

The Gospel of Ruth: Loving God Enough to Break the Rules Details

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From Reader Review The Gospel of Ruth: Loving God Enough to Break the Rules for online ebook

Hannah Rasmussen says

When I heard Carolyn Custis James speak about Ruth five years ago, she emphasized how Ruth, Naomi and Boaz show sacrificial covenant love and partner with God's work. She then asked us to evaluate our relationships with God and the opposite sex. Although I had been a committed Christian for years, it was during that reflection time that God first revealed what his grace really meant. So The Gospel of Ruth truly spoke the gospel to me! James constantly demonstrates that Ruth is no fairy tale romance. It is a theological masterpiece revealing how God's people accomplish his purposes in astonishing ways. Her interpretation stuck with me for years.

Finally, I am reading the book itself as I write a Hebrew exegesis paper. I am impressed by James' depth of research. She has truly devoured commentaries on the subject. James accurately says this is the book she was formed to write. Her personal experiences of being a woman, of barrenness and of loss make this book truly accessible for anyone. She masterfully communicates theological concepts through telling and explaining story - just like the book of Ruth. You can tell when someone is writing about the revelation that saved them - and that's a message with the power to turn readers' lives upside down!

Diane Aldinger-samson says

The author definitely makes you think outside the box. You are forced to look at Naomi and Ruth through different eyes. Not everyone would agree with how Carolyn James looks at these women but I loved how it was different, unique but not unbiblical. The book of Ruth was opened up for me and gave me some insight into my role as a woman. A great read and worth it.

Kathleen says

This is by far the best book study I have ever done. It's not a long book, but there is so much meat to pull from the bones of the story of Ruth, Naomi and Boaz that goes way beyond just a cursory reading. The author does a good job of awakening the reader to seeing the reality of a widow's life in ancient Israel, and the nuances of the law that Ruth's and her compatriots actions challenge.

I cannot recommend enough.

Dayna Dueck says

One of her key points is that Naomi (and Ruth's) suffering is equivalent, or likely much worse, than Job's. And by imposing Western romantic ideas on this story, we largely miss the point. This is a story about God.

"In the aftermath of loss and grief, Naomi's questions came to me as I struggled to put God's hesed for our family alongside such a tragic outcome. Then I asked myself who I would rather hear from in my struggle with God? Someone whose life is picture perfect and doesn't have a scratch? Or a broken-down Naomi whose views of hesed have withstood the multiple assaults of grief and loss, isolation and poverty, depression and despair?" (119)

Eugene Peterson quote: "We live in a time when everyone's goal is to be perpetually healthy and constantly happy... if any one of us fails to live up to the standards that are advertised as normative, we are labeled as a problem to be solved, and a host of well-intentioned people rush to try out various cures on us. The gospel offers a different view of suffering: in suffering we enter the depths; we are at the heart of things; we are near to where Christ was on the cross" (132)

People of prayer as participants in providence...

"They move automatically from prayer into action, getting up off their knees to participate energetically in the answers to their own prayers" (133)

Important to note that Ruth and Boaz are not starting a family. They are rescuing one. There is a huge difference.

NAOMI has a son. (4:7)

Two image bearers--male and female--joining forces to advance God's kingdom on earth. (206)

A better question to ask of God: "Might I have a bit of earth?"

John-Jaimi Jones says

I read this book, *The Gospel of Ruth: Loving God Enough to Break the Rules*, by Carolyn Custis James, because our son who is attending Moody bought it to support the speaker at the 2017 Mission Conference Week. It was a quick read. I thought the author took a lot of liberty when interpreting the the book of Ruth. She did a through job in her research and I appreciate her work and passion about her interpretation of the book. A few things I can agree with, her belief that we are God's image bearers- male and female- serving God together. My disagreements in philosophy begins with her sub-title " Loving God enough to break the rules", I believe that there is a way things work within the creation of God's design and I would not conclude that His design involves blessing of "rule-breaking". Her description of rule breaking does not ring true with my understanding of the book of Ruth. I have a more traditional view of roles and think that view is supported by the book of Ruth. I find that I can agree that we as believers of Jesus Christ, are all students and still learning. I appreciate her having the book of Ruth at the front of the book for easy reference and her statement that The Hero of this story is God, and we must not allow any other hero or heroine to displace Him.

Susan says

Carolyn Custis James approaches many of the familiar themes of the book of Ruth from a new angle. I loved her exploration of Naomi's experiences and struggles with God. This book challenged me to think about this beautiful story from a different perspective--something I always appreciate from a Bible study.

Her feminist viewpoint seemed to drive her interpretation at times--many of the conclusions she drew did not seem to be supported by the text itself, but rather from conjecture drawn from historical portraits of the time period/culture. I felt like too much weight was given to cultural possibilities rather than sticking with what the passage says. This was especially true in her assessment of the conclusion.

Worth reading, but with the understanding that her exegesis is sometimes driven by her feminist hermeneutic.

Catbird says

I loved her approach and study of the two principal characters of the Book of Ruth (Old Testament book of the Bible.); she addresses the sensitive topics of widowhood, infertility, poverty and social dependence unabashedly and with great insight. It was refreshing to read a take on Ruth that didn't smack of "Cinderella"; in fact, it was much more like Job.

However, Custis James' writing style didn't suit my taste. I felt that she spent too many words (chapters, even) telling me WHAT she was GOING to tell me, instead of just telling me.

I became quickly tired of the phrase, "and that's the gospel of Ruth"...while simultaneously thinking to myself, "I know you think that it is, but you haven't told me WHY it is!" Once I plowed through the first 3 or so chapters, she did, in fact, explain why it is...though almost too late. I would recommend it to women looking for a more accurate, real-life view of this precious book of the Bible.

Bonnie says

I was prepared to love this book. The idea of taking the story from the perspective of Ruth's mother-in-law Naomi was one that intrigued me. I was hoping to pre-read this and pass it on as a book for a group at our church.

The beginning showed much promise and had me hooked. Unfortunately I found the chapters which talked about the plight of widows and barren women to be wordy. Once the original thought was brought home it was repeated and repeated and repeated without much new insight, which caused me to begin skimming in order to get to the next thought. My interest was not piqued again after that point.

Ruthanne Mullins says

I know we've all been taught that the Book of Ruth is a story of love and loyalty. However, the author shows us through a different perspective, we can learn deeper even with those stories we think we know by heart. When it is said that the Word is alive, the author is a master at reminding us just how true that is.

Lisa says

Does God Care?

Anyone who wonders should read this book. The author brings to life all the depth and impact of this short story that we modern readers skim over. In her deft hands all three main characters, Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz shed the shallow stereotypes often assigned them and become mighty heroes of faith. Highly recommended.

karen says

I highly recommend this book to women and men interested in understanding the book of Ruth where the perspective is from the historical context & culture. This is not just a love story. The text spoke to me in a fresh way as I find myself in a difficult transition. Naomi is described as a female Job, and this book gives plenty of opportunity to wrestle with the question, is God good to women?

I will leave it at that. In addition the author's writing style is beautiful.

Dalaina May says

I am a missionary with a degree in intercultural studies and 20+ years of walking with the Lord, and this book literally took the legs out from beneath me as the author looked at the book of Ruth from a cultural standpoint (my favorite point she made was that Boaz must have been either married or a widower with sons to have the kind of standing in the community that he had. That changes things, doesn't it?).

Wow! Why haven't I heard this stuff before? I checked out the bibliography page, and this author did her homework. As a student of cultures, the whole time I was thinking "Well, duh! Of course. That makes so much sense." I did not agree completely with every conclusion that she drew from the data, but was certainly intrigued and spiritually challenged. I can honestly say that my view of the book of Ruth is forever changed after reading this book. I am so glad that I read it and have encouraged many of my friends and family to do the same.

David Dunlap says

The Old Testament Book of Ruth is so much more than a lovely little romance story tucked between two dramatic historical books (Judges and 1 Samuel), and author James does a splendid job of bringing out all the issues, conflicts, and blessings 'hidden' in the story. She likens Naomi to a female Job, and shows how a pagan outsider (Ruth) becomes a true believer in God...and the great-grandmother of King David himself. She draws Boaz in bold colors and points to him as a worthy partner of both Ruth and Naomi in expressing the goodness of God...and His claims on the believer's life. I found the book deeply moving at times. -- It was written for women, I suspect, but it is valuable reading for *anyone* who wishes to see more clearly how God works out His redemptive purposes in the life of His people.

Janet Pittman says

Carolyn Custis James provides her perspective on the book of Ruth with insights beyond the typical Cinderella view of Boaz as the Handsome Prince or a Knight in Shining Armor who comes to the rescue of Ruth and her mother-in-law, Naomi. I appreciated the author's view of the villagers in a patriarchal culture who link "Ruth to some of the brightest female luminaries in Israel's constellation." As a nation builder, Ruth portrays the important role of women's calling in His kingdom. Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz demonstrate mutual submission and share a passion to live for God.

Hannah says

Carolyn Custis James has incredible things to say about the Book of Ruth. First she starts out by explaining that the hero of the story isn't Boaz, Naomi, or even Ruth. It is hesed- a Hebrew word for the incredible, self sacrificing love God has for his people. James says, "Whenever we study God's Word, our main quest is always to discover what He is telling us about himself." Through the Book of Ruth, she says, God is telling us of his overwhelming love for women. Not only that, she says, but he is illustrating the crucial role He expects them to play in his kingdom building.

She shows how Ruth, through every step in her journey displays incredible resourcefulness, courage, and self sacrifice. She breaks social norms again and again as she challenges those around her (including Boaz) to live up to the spirit of God's laws. She does this first by requesting more privileges than gleaners usually get (2:6). Then, in a surprising reversal of "gender roles", she not only proposes to Boaz in his own house (3:9) but also challenges him to redeem Naomi's family name as the legal kinsman-redeemer. She shows the hesed of God. As James says, "Ruth showed herself to be anything but a modest, self-effacing foreigner. Rather she emerges as courageous, if not slightly brash. Probably aware of possible rejection and ostracism, she willingly took a sizable risk in order to benefit her mother in law."

Fortunately for the story, Boaz steps up- going above and beyond in allowing Ruth privileges in his field, giving her and Naomi more than enough to live on, agreeing to marry Ruth, and also redeeming the land of Naomi's dead husband. Although Boaz often takes his cues from Ruth, their combined efforts achieve results that separately were out of reach. Without Boaz, Ruth was a barren widow, forced to live on the charity of society- with Boaz she became much more. And Boaz, already an upstanding member of the Jewish community, with the influence of Ruth became an ancestor of Jesus Christ. This, James says is a wonderful illustration of the "Blessed Alliance"- men and women standing together to fight the battles God lays out for them.

While this book is empowering, it is not all snuggles and warm-fuzzies. In fact, quite the opposite. When Naomi and Ruth set out from Moab, they are both widows without children- Naomi because her husband and both of her sons have died. Ruth is widowed and was barren for all ten years of her marriage. In Naomi and Ruth's world, this meant they had no income, no means for support, and no name. James uses this as an opportunity to touch lightly upon her personal struggles with infertility as well as devoting entire chapters to both widowhood and barrenness. She speaks candidly of pain, doubt and confusion, noting that the phrase, "'His ways are not our ways,' doesn't satisfy or soothe a wounded heart." Through barrenness, widowhood and depression she shows how both women lived with, "God's love and a lot of pain together in the same picture."

The book began with the question, "Is God good for women?" Carolyn Custis James uses the lives of two women- battered by almost everything the world could throw at them to answer with a resounding, "yes". She says:

His goodness flows steadily to his daughters as we live and breath, endure sorrows and heartaches, fight battles and partner with our brothers, stumble, fall and struggle back to our feet in this broken, messed-up, very real world that he is redeeming. He doesn't coddle us, for he wants us to be strong. He takes us through deep waters so we will learn wisdom and know him for ourselves. Our lives are not perfect. We have empty places in our hearts. But we are grounded in the truth that he loves us, and that's what keeps us going. He is changing us. He wants us to change our world.
