

## When Did the Story of Ruth Take Place?

Ezer Diena, [ediena@torontotorah.com](mailto:ediena@torontotorah.com)

### General considerations

#### 1. Ruth 1:1 (JPS 1985 translation)

וַיְהִי בַיּוֹם שֶׁפָּט הַשְּׂפָטִים וַיְהִי רָעַב בְּאֶרֶץ יְהוּדָה אִישׁ מִבֵּית לָחֶם יְהוּדָה לָגוּר בְּשֵׂדֵי מוֹאָב הוּא וְאִשְׁתּוֹ וּשְׁנֵי בָנָיו:

In the days when the chieftains ruled, there was a famine in the land; and a man of Bethlehem in Judah, with his wife and two sons, went to reside in the country of Moab.

#### 2. Basic chronology of Sefer Shoftim (based on traditional commentaries and charts found in The Living Nach and Sefer Dor Ledor):

Shofet/leader	Reign	Time from end	Notes
Otniel ben Kenaz	40 years	297	Includes 8 years of oppression under Kushan Rishatayim
Ehud Ben Gera (as well as Shamgar, possibly)	80 years	217	Includes 18 years of oppression by Eglon (Moav)
Devorah (as well as Barak, Yael and Shamgar)	40 years	177	Includes 20 years of oppression by Yavin/Sisera (Kenaan)
Gideon ben Yoash	40 years	137	Includes 7 years of oppression by Midian (note: some count these years separately, and place them before Gideon's rule)
Avimelech ben Gideon	3 years	134	
Tola ben Puah	23 years	121	
Yair Hagiladi	22 years	89	Possibly one overlapping year with Tola
None (oppression by Amon)	18 years	71	
Yiftach Hagiladi	6 years	65	Possible overlap in both directions
Ivtzan (possibly Boaz)	7 years	58	Possible overlap in both directions
Elon Hazvuloni	10 years	48	Possible overlap in both directions
Avdon ben Hilel	8 years	40	Possibly one overlapping year with Shimshon
Shimshon	40 years	0	He may have actually ruled for only 20 years. Includes oppression by Pelishtim. Possibly one overlapping year with Eli Hacoheh, who subsequently ruled for about 40 years.
Story of Pesel Michah (?)			
Story of Pilegesh Begivah (?)			

**Note:** According to these same calculations, David is anointed King of Israel approximately 50 years after the end of the book of Shoftim.

**Note:** Peretz lived approximately 600 years before David.

#### 3. Ruth 4:17-22 (JPS 1985 translation)

וּמִתְקַרְאָנָהּ לוֹ הַשְּׂכֵנּוֹת שֵׁם לְאִמֶּר יְלִד־בֶּן לְנַעֲמִי וּמִתְקַרְאָנָהּ שְׁמוֹ עוֹבֵד הוּא אֲבִי־יִשְׂרָאֵל אָבִי דָוִד: וְאֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדוֹת פְּרָץ פְּרָץ הוֹלִיד אֶת־הַצָּרוֹן: וְהַצָּרוֹן הוֹלִיד אֶת־רָם וְרָם הוֹלִיד אֶת־עֲמִינָדָב: וְעֲמִינָדָב הוֹלִיד אֶת־נַחֲשׁוֹן וְנַחֲשׁוֹן הוֹלִיד אֶת־שַׁלְמָה: וְשַׁלְמוֹן הוֹלִיד אֶת־בְּעֻזָּה וּבְעֻזָּה הוֹלִיד אֶת־עוֹבֵד: וְעוֹבֵד הוֹלִיד אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל וְיִשְׂרָאֵל הוֹלִיד אֶת־דָּוִד:

and the women neighbors gave him a name, saying, "A son is born to Naomi!" They named him Obed; he was the father of Jesse, father of David. This is the line of Perez: Perez begot Hezron, Hezron begot Ram, Ram begot Ammi-nadab, Amminadab begot Nahshon, Nahshon begot Salmon, Salmon begot Boaz, Boaz begot Obed, Obed begot Jesse, and Jesse begot David.

## Suggestions:

### **4. Ruth Rabbah 1:1**

וַיְהִי בַיָּמִי שֶׁפָּט הַשֹּׁפְטִים (רות א':א'), אֹי לְדוֹר שֶׁשִּׁפְטוּ אֶת שׁוֹפְטֵיהֶם, וְאֹי לְדוֹר שֶׁשִּׁפְטִיו צָרִיכִין לְהִשְׁפֹּט, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (שופטים ב':י"ז): וְגַם אֶל שֹׁפְטֵיהֶם לֹא שָׁמְעוּ, וּמִי הָיָה, רַב אָמַר בָּרַק וּדְבוֹרָה הָיָה. רַבִּי יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן לֹוִי אָמַר, שֶׁמֶגֶר וְאַהוּד הָיָה. רַב הוֹנָא אָמַר דְּבוֹרָה וּבָרַק וְיַעֲלֵל הָיָה, שֶׁפָּט חַד, שֶׁפְטִים תְּרִין, הַשֹּׁפְטִים תְּלָתָא.

And it was in the days of the judging of the judges – woe to the generation that judged its judges, and woe to the generation whose judges need to be judged, as it says “and also to their judges they did not listen”. And who were they? Rav says: they were Barak and Devorah. Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi says: they were Shamgar and Ehud. Rav Huna says: they were Devorah Barak and Yael, as “shefot” implies one, “shofetim” implies two, and “hashofetim” implies three.

**Note:** many versions have Rabbah bar Yitzchak instead of Rav.

### **5. Josephus, Antiquities 5:9:1 (Whiston translation)**

Now after the death of Sampson, Eli the High Priest was governour of the Israelites. Under him,<sup>21</sup> when the country was afflicted with a famine...

Note 21: Nay, long before him.

### **6. Talmud Bavli, Bava Batra 91a (Davidson edition translation)**

אמר רבה בר רב הונא אמר רב אבצן זה בעז

Rabba bar Rav Huna says that Rav says: The judge Ibzan of Bethlehem (see Judges 12:8–10) is Boaz.

### **7. Talmud Bavli, Nazir 23b (Davidson Edition translation; see similarly Sotah 47a, Sanhedrin 105b, Horayot 10b)**

וא"ר יוסי ברי חנינא רות בת בנו של עגלון מלך מואב היתה.

And this is as Rabbi Yosei, son of Rabbi Ḥanina, said: Ruth was the daughter of the son of Eglon, king of Moab, who descended from Balak, king of Moab.

**Note:** many versions write that Ruth was the daughter of Eglon

### **8. Dr. Thomas Constable, Notes to Ruth, Scope**

Some scholars date Ruth as a contemporary of Gideon (ca. 1180-1140 B.C.). Some do this because of Judges 6:3-4, which refers to a lack of food during Gideon's judgeship. However, that shortage was not due to a famine, but to the yearly invasions of the Midianites. Moreover, it seems likely that there would have been several famines in Israel during the approximately 300-year period of the judges. Merrill believed that Ruth lived about 1200 B.C. This would place her within the judgeship of Deborah (ca. 1230-1190 B.C.).

### **9. Talmud Bavli, Bava Batra 14b**

שמואל כתב ספרו ושופטים ורות

Samuel wrote his own book, the book of Judges, and the book of Ruth.

### **10. John Gill's Exposition of the Bible, Ruth 1:1**

Alting places it in the time of Jephthah; such is the uncertainty about the time referred to:

### **11. Dr. Yael Zeigler, Ruth: From Alienation to Monarchy, An Introduction: The Days of the Judging of the Judges**

The Book of Ruth's deliberately vague time frame indicates that any attempt to date the book definitively is at odds with the objective of the book itself, which presents Ruth as the solution to the entire era. Nevertheless, the suggestions found in the midrashim can enrich our understanding of the narrative. These midrashim draw our attention to the similarities and differences between the Book of Ruth and certain narratives in the Book of Judges. By contrasting and comparing these stories, we emerge with new perspectives and valuable insights into the Book of Ruth and its characters, values, and messages.