

JONAH & RUTH



GOD IS FAITHFUL

Two books separated by hundreds of years. One written about a prophet of Israel, the other about a refugee. One book tells the story of God supernaturally intervening to spare a city from judgment, the other is an intensely personal story of family love and community. What these books have in common is the unshakable faithfulness of God that each story celebrates. God is at work on a global scale; God is at work in an individual life. God's relentless love reaches from the throne room of a pagan king to the threshing floor of a migrant worker. As we spend a short four weeks in each of these books we will uncover truths of scripture about God, and about ourselves, that will inform how we live as followers of Christ today.

AUTHOR

JONAH

There is no internal or external evidence to ascribe authorship of the book of Jonah to anyone, therefore the book must be considered to be anonymous. The only other mention of Jonah in scripture is 2 Kings 14:25, which allows us to place the events of the book in the first half of the eighth century B.C.¹ Most likely the account was not penned by Jonah himself, but was based upon Jonah's own retelling of the events after he returned from Ninevah.

DATE

As with authorship, a precise date of composition is impossible to nail down. Jonah is the fifth of the twelve "minor prophets," which are referenced in Sirach 49:10, a book of the apocrypha written around 200 BC. Thus we know that the book is at least that old. While some argue for a date of composition after the fall of Nineveh in 612 BC, their arguments are far from conclusive. The tensions of the eighth century prophetic community are present in the writing. It could be that the book was written shortly after the events occurred, or it is possible that it was written much later in the post-exilic period.²

GENRE

A key question when it comes to the book of Jonah is its genre. Is it an allegory (symbolic story), a midrash (an expansive, paradigmatic story), a farce (a comedic exaggeration), or journalistic history (a retelling of actual events as they occurred)?³ Ancient tradition certainly regarded it as an authentic telling of actual events. Josephus included it in his Jewish history, and the early church fathers regarded it as true.⁴ Jesus referred to "the sign of Jonah" (Matthew 12:39-41; 16:4; Luke 11:29-32) comparing Jonah's three days in the fish to Jesus' three days in the grave. Luke 11:32 especially seems to indicate that Jesus viewed the repentance of the Ninevites as a historical occurrence. It does not seem that Jesus viewed the book of Jonah as a parable or an allegory.

¹ Billy K. Smith and Franklin S. Page, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, vol. 19B, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995), 207.

² For a full discussion of evidence regarding the date of writing, see Smith p. 207-209.

³ Walton lists these possibilities along with several others and has a full discussion of each. John H. Walton, "Jonah," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Daniel-Malachi* (Revised Edition), ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 459.

⁴ Smith, 218.

STRUCTURE | While only 48 verses in length, Jonah is a literary masterpiece. The storyline is so simple that a child can follow it, but the literary sophistication of the book rivals any other Old Testament work. The book divides neatly into two halves, each introduced with the phrase “The word of the Lord came to Jonah” (1:1, 3:1). In the first half of the book, Jonah rejects God’s call on his life so strongly that he runs the opposite direction. In the second half of the book, he obeys. In each there is an inward response, then an articulated response, and finally, an outward response.⁵

RUTH

AUTHOR | While the book is named for the main character, there is no internal evidence regarding authorship. The Talmud attributes Judges and Ruth to Samuel, but the Bible does not offer any clues regarding authorship of either book.

DATE | Scholars are divided over the date of authorship. Some place the writing of the book within a few generations of the events described, while others favor a post-exilic date. Because King David is mentioned (4:17, 22), and his ascension to the throne was in 1010 BC, the book was written sometime after that date. The narrator’s use of the phrase “in former times in Israel” (4:7) and “in the days when the judges ruled” (1:1) would indicate that some time has elapsed between the events depicted and the writing of the book.

GENRE | Ruth is considered to be a short story or novella. As one scholar noted, a novella develops its characters, a short story reveals them.⁵ Rather than developing the characters throughout the story, their character is revealed by the decisions they make and the way that they respond to difficulties.

The most obvious characteristic of this classic love story is that it is told from a female perspective. The heart of the story is the relationship between two women, Naomi and Ruth. The female perspective is key to the book. It is not simply a backdrop to the genealogy of men that will follow. The book contrasts with patriarchal narratives such as Genesis. The women live in a patriarchal society, but they are free to act and choose. Their bond with one another helps them overcome famine and the loss of children and spouses.⁶

In addition to the bond between the two women, an additional theme of redeemer, found in the character of Boaz, is present. When Ruth needs a redeemer, it is God who provides. The characters in the book demonstrate the *hesed* love of God to each other in tangible ways. In their treatment of each other, the reader sees what the life of faithful people in community together should look like. Blessings are given and received, and God’s faithfulness is proven out in the hard experiences of life.

STRUCTURE | Ruth divides unevenly into two parts: a complex narrative with a crisis and resolution, and a short genealogy.⁷ The narrative section of the book is considered a literary masterpiece. The story itself is densely packed, yet it retains the charm of character driven short story or novella. The genealogy section is introduced with traditional toledot formula: “These are the generations.” A total of ten generations are described. The conclusion is obvious: the women have played a significant role in the eventual emergence of David.

5 Daniel Isaac Block, Judges, Ruth, vol. 6, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 601.

6 George M. Schwab, “Ruth,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Numbers-Ruth* (Revised Edition), ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 1305.

7 *Ibid.*, 599.

**TEACHING
SCHEDULE**

Jan	1 & 2	Jonah 1	Running from God
	8 & 9	Jonah 2	Crying Out to God
	15 & 16	Jonah 3	Repentance and Salvation
	22 & 23	Jonah 4	God's Heart for the Nations
	29 & 30	Ruth 1	Ruth and Naomi Return
Feb	5 & 6	Ruth 2 & 3	Ruth and Boaz
	12 & 13	Ruth 4:1-12	The Redeemer
	10 & 20	Ruth 4:13-22	Blessing for Naomi and the World

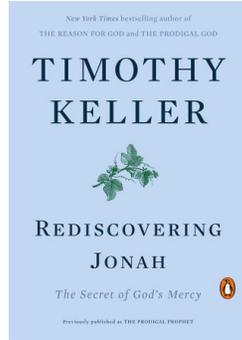
**THEME OF
FAITHFULNESS**

The theme that will unite these seemingly disparate books is the faithfulness of God. In Jonah we see that God is faithful even when Jonah is not. We see that God is faithful to meet us where we are (Chapters 2 and 4) and that God is faithful to His promise to forgive when presented with true repentance (Chapter 3). Finally, we see that God is faithful not just to His people Israel, but to all people (Chapter 4).

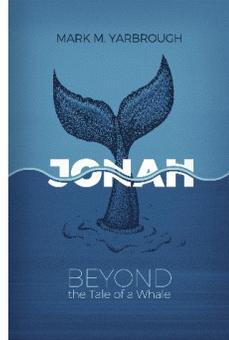
In Ruth we see the faithfulness of God reflected in the faithful actions of His people. We see Ruth steadfastly remain faithful to Naomi in the face of tragedy and loss (Chapter 1). We see Boaz faithfully apply the law to those gleaning in his fields and even going beyond what is required to care for those in need (Chapters 2 and 3). Additionally, we see Boaz acting as Ruth's kinsman redeemer, faithfully applying the law to care for the marginalized, and we will see God faithfully using these people in His larger purposes as He uses their union to keep the Davidic (and ultimately Messianic) line going.

Although these stories are well over 2,000 years old, they still speak to us today. God is still faithful. He is still faithful when His people are not. He still responds to true repentance. He still has a heart for all people. He still cares for the widow, the marginalized, and the poor. He still blesses those who bless others. And He has faithfully kept all of His promises in the person and work of Jesus.

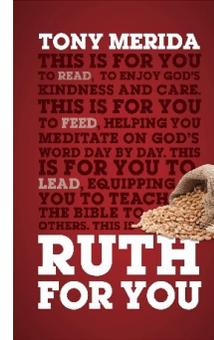
RECOMMENDED
RESOURCES



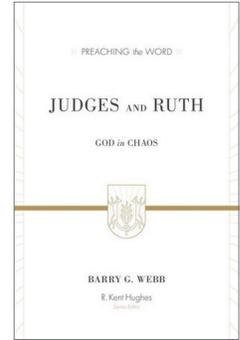
Rediscovering Jonah
by Tim Keller



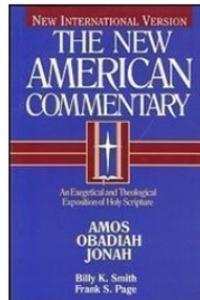
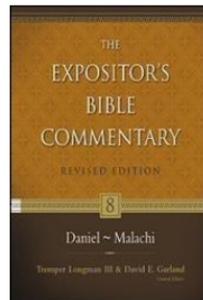
*Jonah: Beyond a
Whale of A Tale*
by Mark Yarbrough



Ruth For You
by Tony Merida



*Judges and Ruth:
God in Chaos*
by Barry G. Webb



Both *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* and *The New American Commentary* are good resources on these books.

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