

**The King is Coming:
Hearing the Message of the Book of Ruth
BIB 628 TC**

*The mission of MB Seminary is to educate and equip men and women to help lead the church
in reaching Canada and beyond with the Good News of Jesus Christ.*

Instructor: Daniel I. Block, DPhil
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Credit Hours: 3
Prerequisites: None
Course Term: May 13 – July 9, 2022
Instruction: May 13–14, 2022

Description

How does the book of Ruth declare eternal truths about God and his ways in the world, and how does it connect to life for Christians in twenty-first-century North America? This course aims to bring to life the message of this delightful “short story” through (1) exploration of the literary style and rhetorical function of Ruth in its original context; (2) systematic serial interpretation of this drama presented in four Acts; (3) theological and practical reflections on the message of the book; (4) guidance in teaching and preaching that message to God’s people.

Objectives

Upon successful completion of this course, you will be able to:

1. Apply the hermeneutical principles that underly sound interpretation of the book of Ruth to other narrative books of the First Testament.
2. Summarize the content and discuss the plot and other literary characteristics of the book of Ruth.
3. Articulate the theological message of the book of Ruth and discuss its significance for Israelite faith and thought for the author’s BC audience.
4. Express confidence in in the authority of the biblical message and demonstrate enthusiasm for sharing that message.
5. Integrate concepts taught by the book of Ruth within a prophetic theology of ministry and a covenantal ethic.

The most effective learning takes place as you carefully process information through higher-order thinking skills. Your performance and evaluation in this course will be based on demonstrating your engagement and learning, not by simply repeating back basic facts. In all that you do in this class, you should always remember to use higher-order thinking skills, as described below:

- Comprehension: demonstrates the ability to grasp meaning, explain, and restate ideas,
- Application: demonstrates the ability to use learned material in new situations,
- Analysis: demonstrates the ability to separate material into component parts and show relationships between the parts,
- Synthesis: demonstrates the ability to put together the separate ideas to form a new whole, to establish new relationships, and
- Evaluation: demonstrates the ability to judge the worth of material against stated criteria.

Required Texts

Alter, Robert. *The Art of Biblical Narrative*. Revised edition. New York: Basic Books, 2011. 240 pages.

Bediako, Daniel K. *Levirate Marriage: Ancient Near Eastern, African, and Biblical Perspectives (Draft)*. 28 pages. Accessible at file:///C:/Users/Danie/Downloads/Levirate_Marriage_ANE_Africa_and_Bible.pdf.

Block, Daniel I., translator. "Deuteronomy." Extracted from *The Gospel according to Moses: A Literary and Theological Commentary on Deuteronomy*. Hong Kong, Inspirata, forthcoming. Oral reading ca. 78 pages.

Block, Daniel I. *Ruth—The King is Coming*. Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the Old Testament 8. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015. 255 pages

Block, Daniel I. "The Nature and Function of Israel's Law within Its Covenantal Context." Pages 259–72 in *Covenant: The Framework of God's Grand Plan of Redemption*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2021. 14 pages.

Dharamraj, Havilah, with Philip Ewan Yalla. *Ruth*. Asia Bible Commentary. Carlisle, UK: Langham Partnership, 2019. 134 pages

Hubbard, Robert. *The Go'el in Ancient Israel: Theological Reflections on an Israelite Institution*. Bulletin for Biblical Research 1 (1991): 3–19. Accessible at https://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/bbr/goel_hubbard.pdf.

Trible, Phyllis. "Ruth, Book of." Pages 842-47 in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 5. Ed. D. N. Freedman. New York: Doubleday, 1992. 5 pages

Supplementary Resource

Block, Daniel I. *Ruth: A Video Study*. Eight Lessons on Literary Context, Structure, Exegesis, and Interpretation. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020.

Schedule and Assignments

Week	Due Date	Assignments	% of Grade	Cumulative
0	May 13	Oral Reading of Deuteronomy and Ruth	2	2
1	May 13–14	Course Intensive (See schedule below)		
2	May 21	Reflection Paper #1	8%	10%
3	May 28	Discussion Group #1	2%	12%

4	June 4	Reflection Paper #2	8%	20%
5	June 11	Discussion Group #2 Research Paper	2% 34%	22% 54%
6	June 18	Reflection Paper #3	8%	64%
7	June 25	Discussion Group #3 Ministry Curriculum Project	2% 34%	66% 100%

Course Intensive (Willingdon Church)	
Friday, May 13, 2022	6:30pm-9:30pm
Session 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to the Book of Ruth • Introduction (1:1–5)
Session 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Act I: In the Land of Moab: The Emptying of Naomi • (The Crisis for the Royal Line; 1:6–22)
Saturday, May 14, 2021	8:30am- 4:30pm
Session 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Act II: In the Field of Bethlehem: Ruth’s First Encounter with Boaz • (The Ray of Hope for the Royal Line; 2:1–23)
Session 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Act III: At the Threshing Floor: Ruth’s Second Encounter with Boaz • (The Complication for the Royal Line; 3:1–18)
Session 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Act IV: In the Town od Bethlehem: The Refilling of Naomi • (The Resolution of the Crisis for the Royal Line; 4:1–17)
Session 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conclusion (1:1–5) • Tying up Loose Ends Theologically and Ethically

Assignments and Evaluation

Advance Oral Reading of the Books of Deuteronomy and Ruth

To “Hear the message of the book of Ruth” we must *hear* the book. The Hebrew word for read (*qārā*) means “to cry out.” Like all ancient literary and canonical texts, the scriptures, both First and New Testaments, were written to be read aloud and heard in community. To aid our concentration, and to capture the oral flavor of both Deuteronomy and Ruth, before the class begins read aloud **first** the entire transcript of Moses farewell addresses to his congregation (Deuteronomy) as translated by Daniel I. Block and **then** the book of Ruth from a modern translation, other than Block’s at the beginning of his commentary. You may do this alone, but if you can do it with others that would be preferred.

Reflection Papers and Discussion Groups: There are three sets of Reflection Papers and Discussion Groups, with grading based on two components for each Paper/Group set. During three weeks of the

course (Weeks 1, 3 and 5), you will write a three-page reflection paper in response to the instructional content and the required readings. Your reflection paper should answer the questions assigned to each of the three weeks (see below). The week after your reflection paper is due, you will meet in church-based discussion groups to discuss your responses to the questions and to explore other related topics. The maximum length for each reflection paper is three pages.

1. **Reflection Papers** (3 reflection papers x 8% = 24% of final grade): The following are the questions you should address in your three reflection papers (there are three questions for each week, so aim for one page per question):

- **Week 1** (due May 21): Hermeneutics; interpreting Hebrew narrative.

1. Having read Robert Alter's *Art of Biblical Narrative*, assess the value of this work by a specialist in Hebrew narrative literature for you as a Christian reading the book of Ruth, specifying both positive and negative features of his discussion. How was it helpful? How was it unhelpful?
2. Having read Havilah Dharamraj and Bediako, discuss the value of hearing the interpretation of the book of Ruth from someone from a totally different culture—and incidentally, much closer to the culture of the author of Ruth than we modern westerners are. What lessons in interpretation did she teach you? What key aspects of interpretation do you think she missed?

- **Week 3** (due June 4) – Biblical theology

1. Having read the book of Deuteronomy aloud, explain how the teaching of Moses in the Torah (Deuteronomy) helps you read the book of Ruth and how you Israel's covenantal theology reflected on the book.
2. Paying attention to the narrator's casting of each of the three principal characters, for each character describe:
 - a. What the character's performances in the book says about the human condition.
 - b. What the characters' speech and actions teach us about God.
3. Paying special attention to how the narrator characterizes God, explain how this book wrestles with the interaction between human freedom and divine sovereignty. Include a discussion of how this book inspires trust in your walk with God.

- **Week 5** (due June 18) – Ethics and ministry.

1. Biblical ethicists have identified four different pillars on which a biblical ethical system may be constructed: (a) Deontological ethics, (b) *imago dei* ethics, (c) *imitatio dei* ethics, and (4) covenantal ethics. Based on the class instruction, your readings for the course, and your interaction with fellow students, explain each pillar and assess the grounds of the ethics of each of the primary characters.
2. Comment briefly on the foundations that you deem to be operative in the lives of the minor characters: (a) Elimelech, (b) Orpah, (c) Pelsoni Almoni, (d) the men and women of Bethlehem.

3. Again, grounding your reflections on the Torah of Moses, assess the significance of the message of the book of Ruth in developing a biblical disposition toward the marginalized in our neighborhoods.
 4. What does it mean for Christians today to be “guided by Torah and driven by the Spirit”?
2. **Discussion Groups** (3 discussion groups x 2% = 6% of final grade): During Weeks 2, 4 and 6, you will meet in a church-based or virtual discussion group to discuss the questions you addressed in your reflection paper, explore other related topics, and contextualize ideas to your ministry setting. A designated leader from the church will facilitate the church-based discussion groups. The assessment of participation in discussion groups involves attendance and actual participation in the group sessions (both are worth 50% of the discussion group mark). The discussion group leaders will use the following rubric to assess each group member’s participation.

Excellent participation	47-50/50	The group member consistently engaged in the group conversations. The person did an excellent job listening to other group members and consistently added meaningful content to the conversations.
Great participation	43-46/50	The group member sometimes engaged in the group conversations. The person was somewhat attentive to the group conversation and would add relevant content periodically.
Good participation	40-43/50	The group member sometimes engaged in the group conversations. The person was somewhat attentive to the group conversation and would add relevant content periodically.
Fair participation	35-39/50	The group member did not often engage in group conversations. The person seemed out of touch with the group conversation and would rarely add relevant content.
Poor participation	<35/50	The group member rarely, if ever, engaged in the group conversations. The person seemed distant and uninterested in the group discussion and even other group members.

3. **Research Paper** (34% of final grade): A 15–18 page paper on what you consider to be a key text in unlocking the theological, ecclesial, and ethical message of the book of Ruth. While you will interpret the selected text within its broader literary context, the focus of your close analysis should be between five and eight verses. Minimally the paper you submit must include the following:
- The appropriate identification of the passage (where the passage starts/stops, its placement within the book, its placement within the Bible, etc), giving specific reasons for each of your conclusions (5 points),

- An analysis of the literary style and characteristics of the passage (citing specific references) (5 points),
 - A detailed and thoughtful application of the appropriate interpretive approach including discussion of key theological terms and cultural concepts that are necessary for understanding the selected passage and the book of Ruth as a whole. Research into these features are the key to giving flesh to the skeleton that is your outline (15 points),
 - A concluding section on the modern relevance and/or application of the passage (8 points), and
 - Specific references from at least five weighty sources, in addition to the Required Texts (1 point)
 - All conclusions and opinions must be supported and documented with relevant and appropriate evidence and/or examples.
4. **Ministry Curriculum Project** (36% of final grade): Using the Research Paper as the foundation, you are to create either a small group study guide or a classroom curriculum based on the Research Paper passage. The study guide / curriculum must reflect the content and principles discussed in this course, and it is to include a section on life and ministry application for the participants. You are to work through the study guide / curriculum with a small group of at least four people (one meeting).
- A thorough and detailed study guide / curriculum (22 points), and
 - A 2,000 word summary of your small group / classroom experience (14 points).

Course Evaluation

Near the conclusion of this course, you will be asked to complete a course evaluation. Because feedback is very important to us, the course evaluation is a required part of the course and is tied to the submission of your last assignment. The course evaluation will be integrated into the Populi classroom in Week 7.

Grading Scale

Letter Grade	Description	Grade Point	Meaning in Graduate Work
A+	Superior	4.30	Exceptionally well-reasoned, compelling development of position. Outstanding incorporation of personal vision as well as of references and resources. Strikingly appropriate examples. Extraordinary insight, critical analytical and evaluative ability, and creativity. Superlative style and language usage. Makes an original contribution and is potentially publishable.
A	Excellent	4.00	Well-argued and convincing development of position. Insightful incorporation of personal vision as well as of references and resources. Notably appropriate examples. Excellent insight, critical analytic and evaluative ability, and creativity. Impressive style and language use.

A-	Very Good	3.70	Thorough and plausible development of position. Skillful incorporation of personal vision as well as of references and resources. Very good examples. Very good insight, analytic and evaluative ability, and creativity. Commendable and fluent style and language usage.
B+	Proficient	3.30	Proficient development of position. Appropriate incorporation of personal vision as well as of references and resources. Relevant examples. Good quality insight, analytic and evaluative ability, and creativity. Clear and correct style and language usage.
B	Good	3.00	Competent development of position, but possibly with some gaps and/or limitations. Good incorporation of personal vision as well as of references and resources. Good examples. Reasonable insight, analytic and evaluative ability. Little creativity. Generally good style and language usage, but possibly with some minor flaws.
B-	Average	2.70	Average development of position, but with obvious gaps and/or limitations. Satisfactory incorporation of personal vision as well as of references and resources. Satisfactory examples. Reasonable insight, analytic and evaluative ability. Little creativity. Generally satisfactory style and language usage, but possibly with some minor flaws.
C+	Adequate	2.30	Adequate development of position with significant gaps and/or limitations. Some incorporation of personal vision as well as references and resources. Adequate use of examples. Very little creativity. Considerable number of issues related to coherence and style.
C	Acceptable	2.00	Limited development of position with a noticeable lack of consistency with personal vision or references. Limited integration with external sources. Acceptable analytic and evaluative ability. Numerous weaknesses in terms of clarity, coherence, and grammar.
C-	Needs Work	1.70	Passable but unimpressive development of position. Position not completely consistent with personal vision or references and resources not taken fully into account or examples are basic or not completely convincing or barely acceptable insight and analytic and evaluative ability. Adequate style and language usage, but with weaknesses in some respects (e.g., clarity, coherence, grammar). Overall quality shows noticeable deficiencies.

F	Below Standard	0.00	Unacceptable work at graduate level. Shows lack of understanding and/or competence in several of the criteria described above. This grade is a failing grade at the graduate level.
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Assignment Grade Appeals

Students can appeal their grade to the course instructor by stating in writing their reasons for contesting the grade. Deadline for such appeals is one week after the student has receipt of grade. Formal course grade appeals can be made directly to Dr. Brian Cooper, Director of Student Development, briancooper@mbseminary.ca.

Web Support-Student Portal — <https://mbseminary.populiweb.com>

All students at MBS will receive a MBS-Populi username and password. This is determined at the time of an online application. If you have any difficulty with your password or your login credentials, please contact Keith Reed, Director of Ministry Support, (keithreed@mbseminary.ca).

Course Intensive/Campus Closure

In the event of deteriorating weather conditions or other emergency situations, every effort will be made to communicate information regarding the cancellation of classes to your church host and contact.

Paper Formatting

Students are required to adhere to the Turabian Notes (Bibliography) format for all papers. Please consult the following [Purdue Owl](#) website for information or:

Turabian, Kate, L. *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Thesis, and Dissertations*, 9th ed. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2018.

Academic Integrity and Avoiding Plagiarism

As Christian scholars pursuing higher education, academic integrity is a core value of the entire MB Seminary community. Students are invited into this scholarly culture and required to abide by the principles of sound academic scholarship at MBS.

Equity of Access

It is the responsibility of a student with a learning disability to inform the MB Seminary Director of Student Development (briancooper@mbseminary.ca) of that fact **before the beginning of a course** so that necessary arrangements may be made to facilitate the student's learning experience. To repeat: To ensure that instructors know to accommodate a student who has a learning access issue, the student must inform the Director of Student Development of a disability before the beginning of the class. After that is too late.