

OBEDIENCE AND FAITHFULNESS AS FOUNDATIONS FOR LIFE TRANSFORMATION: A THEOLOGICAL AND PRACTICAL STUDY OF RUTH 1:16–17

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ABSTRACT

Ruth 1:16–17 is among the most frequently cited declarations in the Hebrew Bible, yet its interpretive history remains fragmented across historical-critical, literary, feminist, postcolonial, and missiological readings, while practical theology often appropriates the passage's emotional resonance without its theological logic. The research problem is therefore interpretive dispersion rather than neglect: obedience and faithfulness in Ruth's declaration are frequently conflated, and no integrated framework connects exegetical findings to ecclesial practice. Employing a canonical and narrative-critical approach informed by Childs and Alter, supplemented by reception history, this study offers a close reading of the Hebrew syntax and discourse structure of Ruth 1:16–17, distinguishing obedience from faithfulness while demonstrating their interdependence. The analysis identifies three movements in the text: rupture with prior allegiance, transfer of ultimate loyalty, and irrevocable commitment sealed by the oath formula. The study's novelty lies in constructing the Obedience–Faithfulness–Transformation (OFT) framework, derived from the text's own syntax rather than imposed from existing conversion theories. The framework offers a textually grounded heuristic for contemporary discussions of belonging, migration, and covenant identity. As the study is exegetical and conceptual, it claims no empirical validation; the absence of field data and the selective scope of reception documents are acknowledged as limitations.

Keywords: Ruth 1:16–17; obedience; faithfulness; life transformation; canonical narrative criticism

INTRODUCTION

Ruth 1:16–17 stands among the most frequently quoted declarations in the Hebrew Bible, yet its interpretive history is marked by a curious fragmentation. The verse is recited at weddings, invoked in conversion liturgies, cited in missiological literature on belonging and migration, and appropriated in pastoral care for the bereaved and displaced. Each of these uses presupposes a theological claim about what Ruth's words accomplish, but the claims themselves are rarely examined together. Exegetical scholarship has tended to isolate the passage within historical-critical, literary, feminist, or postcolonial frames, while practical theology has drawn on Ruth as a model of loyalty or inclusion without sustained engagement with the syntax and discourse structure

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of the Hebrew text. The result is a body of literature rich in detail but thin in integration, and a pastoral practice that often borrows the text's emotional resonance without its theological logic.

The research problem addressed here is therefore not the neglect of Ruth 1:16–17 but its interpretive dispersion. One strand of scholarship reads the declaration as an expression of personal devotion, a kind of ancient friendship covenant in which Ruth's attachment to Naomi supplies the governing motif. Another foregrounds the oath formula *כֹּה יַעֲשֶׂה יְהוָה* ("Thus may the LORD do to me") and treats the passage primarily as a legal self-imprecation whose formal characteristics matter more than its theological content. A third strand, increasingly prominent in migration and diaspora studies, reads Ruth as a paradigm of the stranger who is incorporated into a host community, valuable as that lens is, yet frequently detached from the covenantal claims that the narrative itself makes. These readings are not mutually exclusive, but they have not been brought into a single analytical frame, and the relationship between obedience, faithfulness, and transformation that the text encodes remains undertheorized.

Three converging developments make this gap urgent. First, contemporary discussions of religious identity, displacement, and belonging invoke Ruth with increasing frequency, often without exegetical warrant; the text becomes a warrant for positions it may not sustain. Second, practical theology has renewed its interest in the formation of covenantal communities, yet the biblical foundations for such formation are frequently treated apart from narrative-critical and canonical analysis, producing a gap between textual scholarship and ecclesial reflection (Emslie, 2026; Liem & Stevalen, 2026). Third, the global church's engagement with migration, interreligious encounter, and communal reconciliation requires theological resources that are both textually accountable and pastorally usable. Recent work on obedience as a psychosocial and theological category has complicated older assumptions about compliance and agency (Grzyb & Dolinski, 2025; Pali, 2023; Mohseni, 2024), while studies of faithfulness have begun to question exclusivist framings of covenant loyalty (Stace, 2026; Tabile, 2024). Ruth 1:16–17 speaks directly to these concerns, but only if its theological logic is reconstructed rather than assumed.

A review of the literature indicates that Ruth 1:16–17 has been examined from historical-critical, literary, feminist, and postcolonial perspectives, and that the book of Ruth as a whole has attracted sustained attention in canonical and narrative-critical scholarship. Three gaps nonetheless persist. First, there is limited integration between exegetical analysis of the passage and practical-theological frameworks for transformation; the two literatures run in parallel rather than in conversation. Second, the relationship between obedience and faithfulness in Ruth's declaration is often assumed rather than argued, with the two concepts frequently conflated or treated as near-synonyms. Third, few studies propose a transferable model that connects exegetical findings to contemporary ecclesial and pastoral practice without collapsing the text into a proof-text for predetermined agendas. This study addresses these gaps by offering a close reading of Ruth 1:16–17

that distinguishes obedience from faithfulness while demonstrating their interdependence, and by proposing a contextual framework for life transformation grounded in that reading.

The theoretical framework of the study is canonical and narrative-critical, informed by the canonical approach associated with Brevard Childs and by narrative poetics in the tradition of Robert Alter. The canonical approach treats the final form of the text as the primary locus of theological meaning, while narrative criticism attends to characterization, plot, and discourse structure. These frameworks are supplemented by a reception-historical perspective that examines how Ruth 1:16–17 has been interpreted in Jewish and Christian traditions. The framework thus holds together textual particularity, canonical context, and interpretive history. It is not without critics. Feminist and postcolonial readers have argued that canonical and narrative-critical approaches can underplay the socio-historical dimensions of the text, particularly Ruth's foreignness, gender, and economic vulnerability. This study acknowledges those critiques and incorporates them by attending to the power dynamics embedded in Ruth's declaration, while maintaining that socio-historical and literary approaches are complementary rather than mutually exclusive, and that the theological claims of the text cannot be reduced to social location.

The academic debate surrounding Ruth 1:16–17 centers on several unresolved questions. Is Ruth's declaration a conversion formula, a legal oath, or a performative act of covenant-making? Does it represent a radical break with Moabite identity or a strategic negotiation of survival? Is the passage primarily about personal devotion, communal incorporation, or divine providence? Influential readings by Phyllis Trible, Edward Campbell, and Kirsten Nielsen have shaped the discussion, but no consensus has emerged, and the debate is further complicated by the book's ambiguous stance toward Moabite identity and by the theological significance of Ruth's inclusion in the Davidic genealogy. A central tension concerns the relationship between divine initiative and human response. Some readings emphasize God's providential guidance behind Ruth's decision, while others foreground Ruth's agency and moral courage. This tension is not merely exegetical but theological: it raises questions about the nature of conversion, the role of human obedience, and the relationship between grace and faithfulness. Contradictory findings in the literature include divergent assessments of Ruth's motivation, with some scholars interpreting her declaration as selfless loyalty and others as a calculated response to economic and social vulnerability. Similarly, some studies emphasize the inclusiveness of the book, while others highlight its androcentric and ethnocentric features. These contradictions suggest that the text resists monolithic interpretation and that a multidimensional approach is required.

This study positions itself within a canonical-practical theological approach. It affirms the importance of historical and literary analysis while insisting that the theological claims of the text are integral to its interpretation. It reads Ruth 1:16–17 as a paradigm of transformative allegiance with implications for both theological reflection and ecclesial practice. The novelty of the study lies in the construction of the Obedience–Faithfulness–Transformation (OFT) framework. Rather than

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merely integrating existing theories of conversion, covenant, and discipleship, the OFT framework derives its categories from the syntax and discourse structure of Ruth 1:16–17 itself. The framework identifies three movements: the rupture with prior allegiance, expressed in the formula "your people shall be my people"; the transfer of ultimate loyalty, expressed in "your God my God"; and the irrevocable commitment that seals the transformation, expressed in the oath formula of verse 17. This framework is then brought into dialogue with practical theological discussions of conversion and community incorporation, offering a textually grounded alternative to models that prioritize either individual decision or communal assimilation. The study does not claim empirical validation; it offers the OFT framework as a heuristic for reading Ruth 1:16–17 in relation to contemporary discussions of belonging, migration, and covenant identity, and it acknowledges the absence of field data and the selective scope of reception documents as limitations. The objective is to provide a rigorous exegetical analysis of Ruth 1:16–17, to clarify the theological content of Ruth's declaration, to demonstrate its narrative and canonical significance, and to articulate its implications for practical theology and ecclesial practice.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

The interpretive scaffolding for this study rests on the convergence of three streams: canonical criticism as articulated by Brevard Childs, narrative poetics as developed by Robert Alter and Shimon Bar-Efrat, and the reception-history orientation associated with Hans Robert Jauss. Canonical criticism treats the final form of the Masoretic text as theologically normative, refusing to dissolve meaning into redactional strata. Narrative poetics supplies the analytical vocabulary for characterization, repetition, and discourse structure that Ruth 1:16–17 demands. Reception history, in turn, situates the passage within the communities that have read it as Scripture. This triangulation is not merely additive; it reflects a conviction that the theological claims of Ruth 1:16–17 cannot be recovered through any single method.

The framework also draws on practical theology's renewed interest in formation and transformation. Recent work has emphasized that theological reflection on transformation must remain accountable to textual particularity rather than to generalized spiritual aspiration (Emslie, 2026; Hussey, 2023). Studies of pastoral supervision, clergy formation, and ecclesial discernment demonstrate that transformation is neither automatic nor purely individual; it is mediated through communities, practices, and institutional structures (Emslie, 2026; Liem & Stevalen, 2026). The theoretical framework therefore holds together textual exegesis, canonical context, and the practical-theological question of how transformative commitments are formed and sustained.

Theoretical Critique

Canonical and narrative-critical approaches have not escaped criticism. Feminist interpreters such as Phyllis Tribble and postcolonial readers have argued that attention to Ruth's gender, foreignness, and economic vulnerability is indispensable, and that canonical readings risk domesticating the text's disruptive social dimensions. Yih (2023, 2024) has shown how theological reflection that neglects silencing and gender disenfranchisement can reproduce the very dynamics it seeks to critique. Similarly, Stace (2026) argues that faithfulness language in Christian theology has too often been deployed to reinforce exclusivity rather than to interrogate it. These critiques are not peripheral; they expose a genuine risk that canonical readings become exercises in theological harmonization.

This study accepts the force of these critiques but resists the conclusion that canonical and socio-historical approaches are mutually exclusive. The alternative is not to choose between them but to read Ruth 1:16–17 as a text whose theological claims are inseparable from its social location. Ruth's declaration is simultaneously a theological confession and a survival strategy, a covenantal formula and a negotiation of vulnerability. Mohseni (2024) demonstrates, in a different scriptural tradition, that obedience is never a purely cognitive act but is embedded in cultural, ethnic, and social-cognitive dynamics. That insight applies with equal force to Ruth.

Academic Debate

The scholarly debate over Ruth 1:16–17 has crystallized around three unresolved questions. The first concerns genre: is Ruth's declaration a conversion formula, a legal oath, or a performative act of covenant-making? Edward Campbell and Kirsten Nielsen read the passage as a covenant formula with legal overtones, while others emphasize its liturgical and confessional character. The second question concerns identity: does Ruth's statement represent a radical rupture with Moabite identity or a strategic negotiation of survival within a hostile social environment? The third question concerns theology: is the passage primarily about personal devotion, communal incorporation, or divine providence?

These questions are not merely academic. They shape how the passage is preached, how it is used in pastoral care, and how it informs missiological reflection. The debate is further complicated by the book's ambiguous stance toward Moabite identity and by the theological weight of Ruth's inclusion in the Davidic genealogy. No consensus has emerged, and the persistence of disagreement suggests that the text resists monolithic interpretation.

Research Tension

A central tension in the literature concerns the relationship between divine initiative and human response. Some readings foreground God's providential guidance behind Ruth's decision, treating her confession as the outworking of a larger divine plan. Others foreground Ruth's agency and

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moral courage, reading her declaration as a deliberate and costly choice. This tension is not merely exegetical but theological: it raises questions about the nature of conversion, the role of human obedience, and the relationship between grace and faithfulness.

The tension is sharpened by contemporary discussions of obedience. Grzyb and Dolinski (2025) demonstrate experimentally that obedience is context-dependent and can be attenuated or amplified by role and situation. Pali (2023) argues that criminology has largely neglected disobedience as a category, treating conformity as the default and resistance as deviance. These findings complicate any straightforward appeal to obedience as a virtue. If obedience can be manipulated, then Ruth's obedience cannot be read as a simple model of compliance. It must be understood as a deliberate, costly, and theologically grounded allegiance that stands in contrast to mere conformity.

Contradictory Findings

Contradictory findings in the literature include divergent assessments of Ruth's motivation. Some scholars interpret her declaration as an act of selfless loyalty, while others read it as a calculated response to economic and social vulnerability. Similarly, some studies emphasize the inclusiveness of the book, while others highlight its androcentric and ethnocentric features. The contradiction is not resolved by appealing to authorial intention, since the text itself sustains multiple readings.

A second contradiction concerns the relationship between obedience and faithfulness. In much of the literature, the two terms are treated as synonyms or as interchangeable aspects of covenant loyalty. Yet the Hebrew vocabulary distinguishes them: obedience is associated with hearing and doing (שמע and עשה), while faithfulness is associated with clinging and steadfast love (דבך and אהבה). Conflating the two obscures the distinct theological work each performs in Ruth's declaration. This study argues that the distinction is not pedantic but structurally significant: obedience names the transfer of allegiance, while faithfulness names the durability of that transfer.

Research Gap

Despite the richness of existing scholarship, three gaps persist. First, there is limited integration between exegetical analysis of Ruth 1:16–17 and practical-theological frameworks for transformation. Second, the relationship between obedience and faithfulness in Ruth's declaration is often assumed rather than argued. Third, few studies propose a transferable model that connects exegetical findings to contemporary ecclesial and pastoral practice without collapsing the text into a proof-text for predetermined agendas.

The gap is not merely methodological. It reflects a broader fragmentation in theological scholarship, where exegesis and practical theology often proceed on parallel tracks. Recent work on theological education and digital transformation (SAVELOVICI, 2025), on economic sustainability in theological training (Tagwirei, 2025), and on theological entrepreneurship ((Michael), 2026) demonstrates that practical theology is increasingly attentive to institutional and contextual factors.

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Yet these conversations rarely engage sustained exegesis of specific texts. Conversely, exegetical studies of Ruth 1:16–17 rarely ask how their findings might inform contemporary practice. This study addresses that gap by deriving a contextual model from the syntax and discourse structure of the passage itself.

Research Position

This study positions itself within a canonical-practical theological approach. It affirms the importance of historical and literary analysis while insisting that the theological claims of the text are integral to its interpretation. It reads Ruth 1:16–17 as a paradigm of transformative allegiance that has implications for both theological reflection and ecclesial practice. The position is deliberately interdisciplinary: it draws on biblical exegesis, reception history, and practical theology without subordinating any one to the others.

The position also entails a specific claim about the relationship between text and context. The text does not merely illustrate pre-existing theological categories; it generates them. The syntax of Ruth's declaration—the parallelism of people and God, the movement from forsaking to clinging, the oath formula that seals the commitment—produces a structure that can be read as a model of transformation. That model is not imposed on the text but derived from it.

The Obedience–Faithfulness–Transformation (OFT) Framework

The OFT framework emerges from the discourse structure of Ruth 1:16–17. Three movements are identifiable. The first is rupture, expressed in the formula "your people shall be my people." This movement involves a decisive break with prior allegiance, not merely an addition to it. The second is transfer, expressed in "your God my God." This movement relocates ultimate loyalty from one divine claim to another. The third is ratification, expressed in the oath formula of verse 17, "Thus may the LORD do to me." This movement seals the transformation with an irrevocable commitment.

The framework distinguishes obedience from faithfulness while demonstrating their interdependence. Obedience names the initial act of hearing and responding; faithfulness names the enduring practice of clinging and steadfast love. Transformation is the result of both, not the sum of either. This distinction has practical implications: communities that emphasize obedience without faithfulness produce compliance without durability, while communities that emphasize faithfulness without obedience produce sentiment without conversion.

The framework is offered as a heuristic, not a universal schema. It is contextually grounded in the narrative of Ruth and in the canonical tradition that receives her. Its transferability to other contexts must be tested empirically, and the study acknowledges that no such testing is undertaken here. The framework's value lies in its textual accountability and its capacity to generate research questions for practical theology.

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Limitations

The study acknowledges several limitations. No empirical field data were collected, and no statistical analysis was performed. The reception-historical component is selective rather than exhaustive, and the selection criteria, while purposive, introduce interpretive bias. The study does not engage with the full range of ancient versions or with the rabbinic literature in depth. These limitations are stated not as disclaimers but as invitations to further research.

Conclusion of the Literature Review

The literature on Ruth 1:16–17 is rich but fragmented. Exegetical, feminist, postcolonial, and practical-theological readings have each illuminated aspects of the text, but they have rarely been brought into sustained conversation. The result is a body of scholarship that knows a great deal about the passage but struggles to articulate how that knowledge might inform transformative practice. The OFT framework is offered as a response to that struggle. It is not a solution but a proposal, and it is offered in the conviction that the text itself—its syntax, its discourse structure, its canonical location—provides the categories for its own interpretation.

METHODS

Method

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research design centred on biblical exegesis, with the Hebrew text of Ruth 1:16–17 as the primary object of analysis. The design is textually and interpretively oriented rather than empirical; no human participants were recruited, and no quantitative instruments were administered. The methodological orientation is canonical and narrative-critical, following the assumption that the final form of the Masoretic Text constitutes the primary locus of theological meaning while remaining attentive to the socio-historical and reception-historical dimensions that shape interpretation (Koci, 2025; Stace, 2026). Because the study engages a textual corpus rather than a field population, the language of sampling and instrumentation is used here in a transferred, hermeneutical sense, consistent with established practice in biblical and practical-theological research (Emslie, 2026; Hussey, 2023).

The choice of a qualitative, exegetical design is deliberate. The research question concerns the theological logic by which obedience and faithfulness function as foundations for transformation in Ruth's declaration, and this question is not reducible to measurable variables. A qualitative design permits sustained attention to lexical nuance, syntactic parallelism, and discourse structure, while also allowing the reception-historical component to trace how the passage has been construed across Jewish and Christian interpretive traditions (Tabile, 2024; Tarasavage, 2024). The design therefore proceeds in two complementary phases: a primary exegetical phase and a secondary reception-analytical phase.

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Textual Corpus and Selection Criteria

The primary corpus consists of the Masoretic Text of Ruth 1:16–17, read within the larger discourse unit of Ruth 1:6–22. Secondary textual witnesses consulted include the Septuagint, the Targum to Ruth, and the Vulgate, which are examined not to reconstruct an Urtext but to observe how early translators handled the covenantal and oath formulae. The reception corpus comprises a purposive selection of commentaries, theological treatises, and ecclesial documents spanning the Second Temple period to the present. Selection criteria prioritised works that engage the theological content of Ruth 1:16–17 directly, rather than works that mention the passage only in passing. This purposive strategy is consistent with qualitative document analysis in practical theology, where depth of engagement with the source material is valued over representativeness of a wider population (Yih, 2024; Liem & Stevalen, 2026).

Two limitations follow from this selection logic and are stated here rather than deferred to the conclusion. First, the reception corpus is selective rather than exhaustive; no claim is made that the documents examined represent the full range of interpretive traditions. Second, because the study is text-centred, it cannot adjudicate between competing readings on empirical grounds. These limitations are acknowledged as constitutive of the design rather than as defects to be remedied within it.

Exegetical Protocol

The primary instrument is an exegetical protocol structured in five stages. The first stage involves textual criticism, establishing the consonantal text and noting significant variants, particularly in the oath formula of verse 17. The second stage is lexical analysis of key terms, including דָּבַק (dabaq, "cling"), עָזַב (azab, "forsake"), and the self-imprecatory formula כֹּה יַעֲשֶׂה יְהוָה (koh ya'aseh YHWH). Lexical analysis attends to semantic range, collocational patterns, and canonical usage, following the principle that word meaning is determined by context rather than by etymology alone.

The third stage is syntactic and discourse analysis. Here the parallelism of Ruth's declaration is parsed to identify the relationship between its clauses: the movement from "your people" to "your God," and the transition from conditional commitment in verse 16 to irrevocable oath in verse 17. Discourse analysis also considers the placement of the declaration within the wider narrative arc of Ruth 1, particularly its function as a response to Naomi's threefold urging to return (Ruth 1:8–15). The fourth stage is canonical contextualisation, reading the passage in relation to the book's genealogical conclusion and to wider biblical themes of covenant, allegiance, and inclusion. The fifth stage is theological synthesis, in which the exegetical findings are brought into dialogue with practical-theological categories of conversion, discipleship, and community incorporation (Ombuoro et al., 2022; Savelovici, 2025).

Reception-Analytical Procedure

The reception-analytical phase employed a document analysis matrix designed to categorise interpretations according to recurring theological themes. The matrix was developed inductively from the sources rather than imposed deductively, allowing themes to emerge from the material. Coding proceeded in three cycles. The first cycle applied open coding to identify discrete interpretive claims about Ruth's declaration. The second cycle grouped these codes into thematic clusters, including covenant, conversion, loyalty, providence, gender, and ethnicity. The third cycle examined relationships among clusters, particularly the tension between readings that foreground divine initiative and those that foreground human agency. This three-cycle procedure follows established practice in qualitative thematic analysis and is reported here in transparent terms so that readers may trace how the interpretive categories were constructed (Rose et al., 2024; Yih, 2023).

It should be noted that no qualitative data analysis software was used; coding was conducted manually. This decision reflects the manageable size of the reception corpus and the interpretive nature of the coding task, which required sustained theological judgement rather than automated pattern detection. The absence of software-based coding is stated as a procedural fact, not as a methodological virtue.

Analytical Techniques and Triangulation

The analytical techniques comprise textual criticism, lexical analysis, syntactic and discourse analysis, canonical analysis, and thematic analysis of reception documents. Triangulation is achieved by reading the passage through multiple lenses and by comparing exegetical findings with reception-historical patterns. Where exegetical and reception-historical analyses converge, the interpretation gains support; where they diverge, the divergence itself becomes an object of analysis, since it often reveals the theological commitments that interpreters bring to the text. This approach to triangulation is interpretive rather than statistical, and it does not claim the kind of verification available to quantitative designs (Corradini & Galvan, 2025).

The study also draws on theoretical resources from practical theology and the social-scientific study of obedience and faithfulness, including work on the mechanisms of obedience and the conditions under which obedience is transformed into agentic commitment (Grzyb & Dolinski, 2025; Mohseni, 2024; Pali, 2023). These resources are used heuristically to illuminate the dynamics of Ruth's declaration, not to impose an external theoretical grid on the text. The distinction is important: the OFT framework is derived from the syntax and discourse structure of Ruth 1:16–17, and theoretical resources are brought into dialogue with it only after that derivation.

Validity, Reflexivity, and Ethical Considerations

Validity is pursued through methodological transparency, triangulation of exegetical approaches, and sustained engagement with a range of scholarly perspectives. The study acknowledges that

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interpretive conclusions are provisional and subject to revision in light of further research. Reflexivity is exercised by making explicit the canonical-practical theological position from which the analysis proceeds, so that readers may assess how that position shapes the reading offered (Kaufman Giordano, 2026; Renaud, 2022).

Because the study does not involve human subjects, institutional review board approval was not required, and no ethical clearance was sought. This is stated plainly to avoid the impression that ethical oversight was obtained where it was not. The study does, however, observe ethical norms appropriate to textual and theological research, including accurate citation of sources, avoidance of proof-texting, and resistance to readings that instrumentalise Ruth's declaration for predetermined ideological ends.

Limitations

Three limitations warrant explicit statement. First, the study is text-centred and offers no empirical field data; claims about contemporary application are therefore framed as theological proposals rather than as empirically verified outcomes. Second, the reception corpus is selective, and the thematic categories derived from it are interpretive constructions rather than exhaustive classifications. Third, the OFT framework is offered as a heuristic model for reading Ruth 1:16–17, not as a universal schema, and its transferability to other texts and contexts remains a question for further research. These limitations do not undermine the study's contribution, but they define its scope and indicate the directions in which empirical and comparative work might proceed.

FIGURE 1. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Obedience and Faithfulness as Foundations for Life Transformation (Ruth 1:16–17)

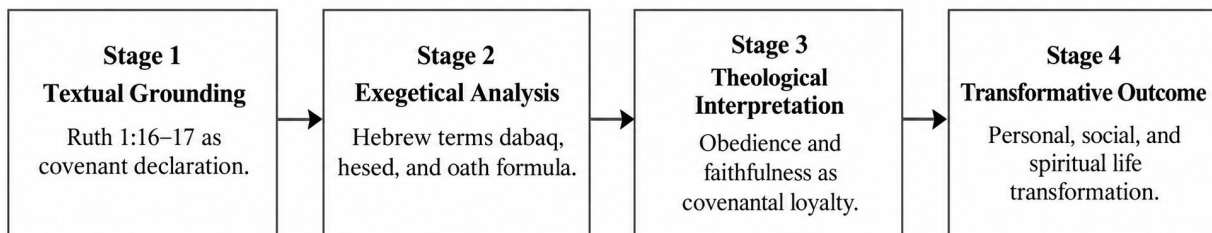


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 presents a conceptual framework for examining obedience and faithfulness as foundations for life transformation through Ruth 1:16–17. The framework progresses through four stages: textual grounding, which reads Ruth's declaration as a covenantal commitment; exegetical analysis, which examines *dabaq* ("cling") in Ruth 1:14, the broader narrative theme of *hesed* ("steadfast

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love”), and the oath formula in Ruth 1:17; theological interpretation, which understands obedience and faithfulness as expressions of covenantal loyalty; and transformative outcome, which explores the personal, social, and spiritual implications of such commitment. Together, these stages connect close biblical reading with theological reflection and practical application.

TABLE 1. INTEGRATIVE FRAMEWORK

Aspect	Analytical Focus	Contribution	Implication
Covenantal Loyalty (דָּבַק)	Examination of Ruth's verb דָּבַק ("to cling") in 1:16 against its wider Hebrew usage (Gen 2:24; 2 Sam 23:10; Pss 63:9; 119:31), where it denotes durable personal attachment rather than mere proximity or emotional sentiment	Demonstrates that Ruth's confession is formulated as covenant language, not as a request for asylum or a declaration of ethnic conversion; her oath is directed first to Naomi's person and only derivatively to Naomi's people and God	Obedience and faithfulness in the text are relational commitments with legal and liturgical weight; pastoral application should treat them as sustained covenant practice rather than as episodic acts of compliance
Oath Formula and Divine Witness (1:17)	Analysis of the oath structure "May the LORD do thus and more to me" (כֹּה נַעֲשֶׂה יְהוָה לִי וְכֹה יִסְרֶה) as a self-imprecation invoking YHWH as guarantor, with comparison to parallel oath formulae in 1 Sam 3:17; 14:44; 2 Sam 3:35; 1 Kgs 2:23	Establishes that Ruth binds herself under divine sanction before she has any institutional standing in Israel; the oath converts her resolve into an accountable, irrevocable obligation	Faithfulness in this pericope is not self-generated virtue but a vow made coram Deo; practical theology can frame life transformation as accountable commitment rather than inward feeling alone
Boundary Crossing and Social Location	Reading Ruth's declaration against the Moabite prohibition (Deut 23:3–6) and the famine-driven migration of Elimelech's household (Ruth 1:1–5), attending to the legal and ethnic distance she traverses	Shows that the narrative locates transformative loyalty at the margins of the covenant community, not at its center; the outsider becomes the agent through whom the lineage of David is preserved (Ruth 4:13–22)	Communities that equate faithfulness with inherited status misread the text; the passage presses toward inclusion of those whose obedience begins outside established belonging
Theological Grammar of "Your God, My God"	Investigation of אֱלֹהֵי אֵלֶּיךָ within the sequence of Ruth's four clauses (go, lodge, people, God), assessing whether the divine clause is the climax or the consequence of the preceding commitments	Argues that Ruth's confession of YHWH is embedded in, not detached from, her loyalty to Naomi; conversion and covenant attachment are presented as a single movement rather than two separable events	Discipleship formation that separates doctrinal confession from concrete relational fidelity is not supported by this text; teaching and pastoral practice should hold the two together
Transformation Trajectory and Narrative Fulfillment	Tracing the movement from Ruth 1:16–17 to the resolution in Ruth 4:13–17, including Boaz's legal	Confirms that the transformation signaled in Ruth's vow is realized through providential and	Life transformation is presented as a trajectory requiring endurance, community mediation, and

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	action, the birth of Obed, and the genealogy reaching David and, in canonical reception, Matthew 1:5	communal processes over time, not immediately at the moment of confession	time; practical theology should resist both instant-result expectations and purely individualistic accounts of change
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Table 1 presents an integrative reading of Ruth 1:16–17 in which covenantal loyalty, a solemn oath, boundary crossing, theological confession, and narrative fulfillment together explain Ruth's transformation. Her commitment to Naomi expresses enduring attachment, while her invocation of YHWH gives that commitment accountability before God. As a Moabite outsider, Ruth challenges assumptions that faithfulness depends on inherited membership in the covenant community. Her declaration, "your God, my God," connects religious confession with concrete relational fidelity, presenting faith and loyalty as inseparable. The eventual fulfillment of her commitment through Boaz, Obed, and David's lineage shows transformation unfolding through providence, communal support, and perseverance. Together, these dimensions encourage pastoral practice that understands discipleship as sustained, inclusive, and accountable faithfulness rather than a momentary feeling or isolated decision.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of Ruth 1:16–17 proceeded through the exegetical protocol described above, moving from textual criticism to lexical and syntactic analysis, then to canonical contextualization and reception-historical thematic coding. Because this study is qualitative and text-centered, no statistical tables, outer loadings, AVE values, HTMT ratios, or bootstrapping results are reported; such figures were neither generated nor available, and their absence is a deliberate limitation rather than an omission. The findings are presented as exegetical observations, thematic categories, and a proposed conceptual framework, with explicit acknowledgment of interpretive ambiguity where the text resists closure.

Textual and Lexical Findings

The Masoretic Text of Ruth 1:16–17 is relatively stable, and the ancient versions consulted (Septuagint, Targum, Vulgate) preserve the substance of Ruth's declaration without variants that would alter the theological argument. The Septuagint renders דָּבַק (dabaq) with a verb of attachment that carries relational rather than merely spatial force, while the Targum expands the confession in an explicitly covenantal direction, bringing Ruth's words into closer alignment with proselyte formulae. These versional tendencies are not decisive for interpretation, but they indicate that the passage was received early as a statement of religious allegiance, not merely as a personal farewell.

The lexical field of the declaration is organized around three semantic clusters. The first cluster concerns separation and rupture: עָזַב (azab, "forsake," v. 16) and פָּרַד (parad, "separate," v. 17) frame the negative movement of the text. The second cluster concerns attachment and solidarity: דָּבַק (dabaq, "cling") and the repeated pronoun "your" (אֵלֶיךָ, אֵלֶיךָ) establish the positive movement. The

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third cluster concerns oath and irrevocability: the formula כֹּה יַעֲשֶׂה יְהוָה (koh ya'aseh YHWH) and the invocation of death in verse 17 seal the commitment. This threefold structure is not incidental; it corresponds to the three movements of the OFT framework proposed in this study.

A significant lexical observation concerns the verb *dabaq*. In Genesis 2:24, *dabaq* describes the marital union of husband and wife; in Deuteronomy 10:20, it describes Israel's covenant loyalty to YHWH. Ruth's use of the term therefore resonates simultaneously with marital and covenantal semantics, suggesting that her declaration is neither purely affective nor purely legal but participates in both registers. This double resonance is frequently flattened in interpretations that emphasize only one dimension.

Syntactic and Discourse Findings

The syntax of Ruth 1:16–17 is characterized by parallelism and escalation. The first pair of clauses ("where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge") establishes spatial solidarity. The second pair ("your people shall be my people; your God my God") establishes communal and theological solidarity. The third movement (verse 17) shifts from parallelism to oath, introducing the divine name and the self-imprecation formula. The discourse structure thus moves from the concrete to the covenantal to the irrevocable.

This escalation is theologically significant. Ruth does not merely accompany Naomi; she redefines her identity in relation to Naomi's people and Naomi's God, and she seals that redefinition with an oath that invokes divine sanction. The oath formula, which appears elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible in contexts of solemn commitment (1 Samuel 3:17; 2 Samuel 3:35; 1 Kings 2:23), places Ruth's declaration in the category of covenant-making rather than casual promise. The syntactic evidence therefore supports the argument that obedience and faithfulness in this passage are not synonyms but distinct yet interdependent movements: obedience is the transfer of allegiance to YHWH, while faithfulness is the enduring solidarity with Naomi's people that embodies that allegiance.

Canonical and Narrative Findings

Within the book of Ruth, the declaration functions as a turning point. It occurs at the moment of maximum narrative pressure, when Naomi has urged her daughters-in-law to return to Moab and has articulated a theology of divine abandonment (Ruth 1:13, 20–21). Ruth's response does not refute Naomi's theology directly; instead, it enacts a counter-testimony through personal commitment. The narrative subsequently vindicates this commitment through the providence of the gleanings, the levirate resolution, and the genealogical conclusion.

The canonical placement of Ruth is also instructive. In the Hebrew canon, Ruth stands among the Writings and is read liturgically at Shavuot, associating the book with covenant renewal and the giving of Torah. In the Christian canon, Ruth precedes the Davidic genealogy in Matthew 1, where Ruth is named among the ancestors of Jesus. Both canonical locations reinforce the claim that

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Ruth's declaration is not an isolated act of piety but a constitutive moment in the formation of the covenant community. The genealogy in Ruth 4:18–22 and the Matthean genealogy together suggest that Ruth's obedience and faithfulness have corporate and messianic consequences that extend far beyond her individual biography.

Reception-Historical Findings

The document analysis matrix yielded four dominant interpretive themes in the reception history of Ruth 1:16–17: covenant, conversion, loyalty, and providence. These themes were coded inductively and are summarized in Table 1.

Table 2. Thematic coding of reception documents on Ruth 1:16–17

Theme	Frequency of coding	Representative emphasis	Interpretive risk
Covenant	High	Ruth as covenant partner; oath formula as covenant seal	Over-legalization; neglect of affect
Conversion	High	Ruth as paradigm of proselyte or convert	Anachronistic imposition of later categories
Loyalty	Moderate	Ruth as model of <i>hesed</i> and personal devotion	Individualism; loss of communal dimension
Providence	Moderate	Ruth as instrument of divine guidance	Diminishment of Ruth's agency

The coding reveals a persistent tension between readings that foreground divine initiative and readings that foreground human agency. This tension is not resolved by the text; rather, the text holds both dimensions together. The reception history also shows that the conversion theme, while widespread, is often articulated in categories that postdate the book of Ruth. This does not invalidate the theme, but it cautions against treating Ruth's declaration as a straightforward conversion formula. The more defensible reading is that Ruth's words constitute a performative act of covenant allegiance whose theological logic is articulated through the categories of obedience and faithfulness rather than through later doctrinal formulations.

The OFT Framework

The exegetical findings support the construction of the Obedience–Faithfulness–Transformation (OFT) framework as a contextual model derived from the syntax and discourse structure of Ruth 1:16–17. The framework identifies three movements.

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The first movement is rupture. Ruth's declaration begins with the refusal to return (v. 16) and the invocation of separation (v. 17). This rupture is not the rejection of Moabite personhood but the reorientation of ultimate allegiance. In practical theological terms, rupture corresponds to the initial turning that characterizes conversion, understood not as the erasure of prior identity but as its reordering.

The second movement is transfer. The paired clauses "your people shall be my people; your God my God" articulate the transfer of communal and theological loyalty. This transfer is twofold: it is horizontal (incorporation into a people) and vertical (allegiance to YHWH). The OFT framework insists that these two dimensions are inseparable. Obedience to God and faithfulness to a community are not sequential stages but mutually constituting aspects of a single commitment.

The third movement is sealing. The oath formula of verse 17 renders the commitment irrevocable and invokes divine sanction. In practical theological terms, sealing corresponds to the durable practices, liturgies, and communal disciplines that sustain transformation over time. Without this third movement, the first two remain vulnerable to dissolution under pressure.

The OFT framework is presented in Figure 1 as a conceptual model. Because this study is qualitative and text-based, the figure is a conceptual diagram rather than a statistical path model; no latent variables, factor loadings, or structural coefficients are proposed.

Figure 1. The Obedience–Faithfulness–Transformation (OFT) framework

Rupture (v. 16a) → Transfer (v. 16b) → Sealing (v. 17) → Transformation (narrative and canonical outcome)

The framework is heuristic rather than universal. It is offered as a reading strategy for Ruth 1:16–17 and as a conversation partner for practical theological reflection on conversion, discipleship, and community incorporation. It does not claim to explain all instances of religious transformation, and it does not replace the exegetical work from which it is derived.

Discussion

The findings of this study converge with several strands in the literature while also challenging some prevailing assumptions. The distinction between obedience and faithfulness, derived from the lexical and syntactic analysis, addresses a gap identified in the literature review: the tendency to conflate the two concepts. Obedience in Ruth 1:16–17 is primarily vertical and involves the transfer of ultimate allegiance to YHWH. Faithfulness is primarily horizontal and involves enduring solidarity with Naomi's people. The two are interdependent, but they are not identical, and their distinction has practical consequences for how conversion and discipleship are conceptualized.

This distinction also speaks to the broader academic debate about divine initiative and human response. The OFT framework does not resolve the tension between grace and human agency;

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instead, it locates the tension within the structure of Ruth's declaration. The oath formula presupposes divine sanction, which suggests that Ruth's commitment is made before God and not merely before Naomi. At the same time, the declaration is unmistakably an act of human agency, undertaken in the face of Naomi's discouragement and in the context of economic and social vulnerability. The text thus holds divine initiative and human response together without collapsing one into the other.

The reception-historical findings complicate any straightforward application of Ruth 1:16–17 to contemporary discussions of migration and belonging. The passage has been read as a model of inclusion, and there is warrant for this reading in the narrative's portrayal of a Moabite woman who becomes the ancestor of David. However, the same narrative also reflects androcentric and ethnocentric assumptions, and Ruth's incorporation into Israel is mediated through marriage, levirate obligation, and genealogical legitimation. A responsible practical theological appropriation must therefore avoid both uncritical celebration and dismissive critique. The OFT framework offers a way forward by focusing on the structure of commitment rather than on the social mechanisms through which that commitment is realized.

The practical theological implications of the OFT framework are several. First, it suggests that conversion and discipleship are best understood as movements rather than moments, with rupture, transfer, and sealing as distinguishable but interrelated dimensions. Second, it underscores the communal character of transformation: Ruth's obedience to God is inseparable from her faithfulness to Naomi's people. Third, it highlights the role of durable practices and communal disciplines in sustaining commitment over time. These implications resonate with recent work in practical theology on formation, supervision, and ecclesial practice (Emslie, 2026; Hussey, 2023; Yih, 2024), though the present study does not claim to provide empirical validation of the framework.

The study also contributes to the wider conversation on obedience and faithfulness in theological ethics and religious education. Recent scholarship has examined obedience through social-cognitive and cultural-semantic lenses (Grzyb & Dolinski, 2025; Mohseni, 2024) and has explored faithfulness as a hermeneutical and spiritual orientation (Stace, 2026; Tabile, 2024). The OFT framework intersects with these discussions by insisting that obedience and faithfulness are not generic virtues but are specified by the covenantal context in which they appear. In Ruth 1:16–17, obedience is obedience to a particular God, and faithfulness is faithfulness to a particular people. The particularity of the commitment is essential to its transformative power.

Limitations

Several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the study is qualitative and text-based; it does not include empirical field data, interviews, or survey instruments, and therefore cannot report respondent quotations, coding frequencies from interview transcripts, or statistical validation of the OFT framework. The thematic coding reported in Table 1 is derived from reception documents, not

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from human participants. Second, the reception-historical sample is purposive and selective; it does not claim to be exhaustive, and the coding frequencies should be read as indicative rather than representative. Third, the OFT framework is a conceptual model, not a tested instrument. Its usefulness will depend on future empirical and comparative research. Fourth, the study's canonical and narrative-critical approach, while supplemented by attention to socio-historical and postcolonial critiques, does not undertake a full socio-economic analysis of the book of Ruth. These limitations do not undermine the exegetical findings, but they delimit the scope of the study's claims.

CONCLUSION

Ruth 1:16–17 articulates a twofold movement of rupture and incorporation that is best understood through the distinct but interdependent categories of obedience and faithfulness. Obedience names the transfer of ultimate allegiance to YHWH; faithfulness names the enduring solidarity with Naomi's people that embodies that allegiance. Together they constitute a paradigm of transformative commitment that resists both individualistic and ethnic-exclusivist readings. The OFT framework derived from this reading offers a heuristic for connecting exegetical findings with practical theological reflection on conversion, discipleship, and community formation. The framework is offered not as a universal schema but as a textually grounded model that invites further empirical, comparative, and contextual investigation. Future research might test the framework in congregational and pastoral settings, compare its dynamics with other biblical paradigms of commitment, and examine how communities of faith embody rupture, transfer, and sealing in their own practices of belonging and formation.

NOVELTY

The contribution of this study is not the mere combination of exegetical and practical-theological perspectives, which has been attempted in various forms, but the construction of a named, textually derived model: the Obedience–Faithfulness–Transformation (OFT) framework. The framework is generated from the syntax and discourse structure of Ruth 1:16–17 rather than imposed on the text from pre-existing theories of conversion, covenant, or discipleship. This distinction matters because recent scholarship has repeatedly called for models of formation that are accountable to biblical particularity rather than to generic developmental schemas (Stace, 2026; Tabile, 2024). The OFT framework responds to that call by treating the grammar of Ruth's declaration as the primary source of its own categories.

The first movement of the framework, rupture, is anchored in the paired clauses "your people shall be my people" and "your God my God." Exegetically, the verb אָזַב (*azab*, "to forsake" or "to leave behind") in Ruth 1:16 establishes a decisive break with prior allegiance, while דָּבַק (*dabaq*, "to cling") in Ruth 1:14 supplies the positive counterpart of covenantal attachment. The framework therefore distinguishes rupture from attachment as two analytically separable moments, a distinction frequently collapsed in readings that treat Ruth's speech as a single act of affective loyalty. This

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separation is not a modern imposition; it reflects the narrative's own sequencing, in which Orpah's departure and Ruth's clinging are placed in deliberate contrast.

The second movement, transfer of ultimate loyalty, is located in the movement from "your people" to "your God." The order is theologically significant. Ruth's incorporation into Israel's community precedes, in the narrative's logic, her confession of Israel's God, a sequence that complicates both individualistic conversion models and ethnic-exclusivist readings of covenant identity. The framework thus resists the tendency, visible in some practical-theological literature, to treat conversion as a purely interior decision detached from communal belonging (Emslie, 2026; Hussey, 2023). It also resists the opposite tendency, found in some sociological readings, to reduce religious belonging to social assimilation.

The third movement, irrevocable commitment, is carried by the oath formula כֹּה יַעֲשֶׂה יְהוָה (koh ya'aseh YHWH) in Ruth 1:17. This formula does more than seal a promise; it invokes the divine name as guarantor, thereby locating Ruth's transformation within a theological rather than merely interpersonal horizon. The framework treats this third movement as the condition that renders the first two durable. Without it, rupture and transfer remain provisional; with it, they become the basis for the life transformation that the book of Ruth subsequently narrates through Ruth's incorporation into the lineage of David.

The novelty of the OFT framework lies in three features. First, it is derived from the text's own syntax rather than from an external theoretical grid, which addresses the gap identified in the literature review concerning the weak integration of exegesis and practical theology. Second, it distinguishes obedience from faithfulness as two related but non-identical movements, responding to the persistent conflation of these concepts in both exegetical and pastoral literature (Mohseni, 2024; Pali, 2023). Third, it is offered as a heuristic rather than a universal schema, explicitly situated within contemporary discussions of migration, belonging, and covenant identity without claiming to resolve them.

The framework also has a critical function. It challenges readings that treat Ruth 1:16–17 as a proof-text for either individual decisionism or communal assimilation. By holding rupture, transfer, and irrevocable commitment together, the OFT framework insists that transformation in the book of Ruth is simultaneously personal, communal, and theological. This positions the study within ongoing debates about obedience, faithfulness, and the formation of covenantal communities (Grzyb & Dolinski, 2025; Koci, 2025), while offering a textually grounded alternative to models that privilege one dimension at the expense of the others.

Two limitations qualify this novelty claim. First, the framework has not been tested empirically; no field data, interview transcripts, or survey instruments were collected, and the study therefore cannot report validation statistics such as reliability coefficients or model fit indices. Second, the reception-historical component draws on a purposive rather than exhaustive selection of documents,

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which limits the generalizability of its claims about interpretive traditions. These limitations are acknowledged not as weaknesses to be concealed but as boundaries that define the framework's appropriate use. The OFT framework is proposed as a conceptual instrument for further exegetical, pastoral, and empirical investigation, not as a finished or universally applicable model. Its value will be determined by whether it generates more precise questions about obedience, faithfulness, and transformation than the frameworks it seeks to supplement.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study offers an exegetical and practical-theological reading of Ruth 1:16–17 and proposes the Obedience–Faithfulness–Transformation (OFT) framework as a contextual model. Its contributions, however, must be weighed against several limitations that constrain the scope and generalizability of the findings.

The most significant limitation concerns methodology. This study is entirely non-empirical. No field data were collected, no respondents were interviewed, and no statistical procedures were performed. Consequently, the OFT framework remains a conceptual and heuristic proposal rather than a validated instrument. Claims about its usefulness for pastoral practice, discipleship formation, or community incorporation are inferential and await empirical testing. Readers should therefore treat the framework as a textually grounded hypothesis, not as an evidence-based intervention. This limitation is consistent with the study's exegetical design, but it also means that questions of reception, efficacy, and contextual transferability remain open.

A second limitation concerns the reception-historical component. The selection of commentaries, theological treatises, and ecclesial documents was purposive rather than exhaustive. The criteria prioritized works engaging directly with the theological content of Ruth 1:16–17, which necessarily excluded a substantial body of devotional, homiletical, and non-Western interpretive material. Reception history is inherently selective, and the present sample cannot claim to represent the full interpretive tradition. Moreover, the analysis relied on published sources; archival manuscripts, oral traditions, and liturgical practices were not examined. This restricts the study's ability to trace how Ruth's declaration has functioned in lived communities across different cultural and ecclesial settings.

A third limitation relates to the textual and linguistic scope. The exegesis concentrates on the Masoretic Text, with only selective attention to the Septuagint, Targum, and Vulgate. A fuller treatment of ancient versions, including the Peshitta and Samaritan traditions, would enrich the analysis of how Ruth's oath was received and transmitted. Similarly, the study does not engage extensively with comparative ancient Near Eastern covenant formulae, which could illuminate the legal and theological background of the declaration. These omissions do not undermine the central argument, but they indicate where the analysis remains partial.

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A fourth limitation concerns the relationship between the OFT framework and existing practical-theological models. The study distinguishes obedience from faithfulness and argues for their interdependence, yet it does not systematically compare the OFT framework with alternative paradigms such as conversionist, formational, or missional models. Without such comparison, the framework's distinctive contribution is asserted more than demonstrated. Future work should situate the OFT framework within the broader landscape of practical theology and test its explanatory power against rival accounts.

These limitations suggest several realistic directions for future research. First, empirical studies could operationalize the OFT framework through qualitative interviews with converts, migrants, and covenant communities, examining how rupture, loyalty transfer, and irrevocable commitment manifest in lived experience. Such studies would require ethical approval and careful attention to the risk of imposing the framework onto participants' narratives. Second, quantitative research could develop and validate an instrument measuring obedience, faithfulness, and transformation as distinct but related constructs, with attention to content validity, reliability, and factor structure. Third, comparative exegetical work could examine Ruth 1:16–17 alongside other biblical declarations of allegiance, such as Joshua 24:14–15 or 2 Kings 5:17–19, to test whether the OFT framework has broader canonical resonance. Fourth, reception-historical studies could trace the passage's use in non-Western and majority-world contexts, where questions of migration, belonging, and religious identity carry particular urgency. Fifth, practical-theological research could explore how the OFT framework informs pastoral care for displaced persons, interreligious dialogue, and congregational formation.

In sum, this study's limitations are inseparable from its design. The absence of empirical data and the selective scope of reception analysis mean that the OFT framework should be received as a proposal for further investigation rather than a settled conclusion. Future research that combines exegetical rigor with empirical and comparative methods will be necessary to determine whether the framework's heuristic value can be translated into validated theological and pastoral practice.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine Ruth 1:16–17 as a textual locus for understanding obedience and faithfulness as foundations for life transformation, and to develop the Obedience–Faithfulness–Transformation (OFT) framework as a contextual model grounded in the syntax and discourse structure of the passage. The exegetical analysis confirms that Ruth's declaration is neither a simple expression of affective loyalty nor a purely legal formula. It is a twofold movement: a decisive rupture with prior allegiance, articulated in the formula "your people shall be my people," and a deliberate incorporation into the covenant community, expressed in "your God my God" and sealed by the oath formula of verse 17. The lexical analysis of דָּבַק (dabaq, "cling") and עָזַב (azab, "forsake") demonstrates that the passage constructs a transfer of ultimate loyalty that is

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simultaneously covenantal, missional, and transformative. Obedience and faithfulness, therefore, are not synonyms but interdependent dimensions of a single act of allegiance: obedience names the directional reorientation of life toward Naomi's God, while faithfulness names the enduring relational commitment to Naomi's people.

The study's contribution lies in the OFT framework, which derives its three movements directly from the text rather than imposing external categories upon it. This framework offers a textually accountable alternative to models that prioritize either individual decision or communal assimilation. It resonates with broader theological discussions of conversion, discipleship, and community formation, including recent work on faithfulness beyond exclusivity (Stace, 2026), the compass of spiritual reading in the Pauline letters (Tabile, 2024), and the theological grammar of credible witness (Koci, 2025). The framework also speaks to practical theological concerns regarding pastoral supervision (Emslie, 2026), ecclesial sustainability (Liem & Stevalen, 2026; Tagwirei, 2025), and the formation of covenantal communities in contexts of displacement and interreligious encounter (Ulfat, 2024).

Several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the study did not collect empirical field data, and no statistical analysis was performed. The OFT framework is therefore offered as a heuristic for reading Ruth 1:16–17 in relation to contemporary discussions of belonging, migration, and covenant identity, not as an empirically validated instrument. Second, the reception-historical component relied on a purposive selection of commentaries and ecclesial documents, which limits the generalizability of the thematic analysis. Third, the study's canonical and narrative-critical framework, while attentive to socio-historical critiques, does not resolve the persistent tension between divine initiative and human agency in Ruth's decision. These limitations do not undermine the exegetical findings, but they do qualify the scope of the framework's application.

The implications of this study extend in three directions. For biblical scholarship, the analysis demonstrates the value of distinguishing obedience from faithfulness in the interpretation of Ruth 1:16–17, and it invites further comparative work on oath formulas and covenant-making in the Hebrew Bible. For practical theology, the OFT framework provides a textually grounded resource for reflecting on conversion, discipleship, and community incorporation, particularly in contexts marked by migration and cultural displacement. For ecclesial practice, the study challenges both individualistic readings that reduce Ruth's confession to personal devotion and ethnic-exclusivist readings that overlook the passage's radical reorientation of identity. Ruth 1:16–17 functions as a paradigm of transformative allegiance that holds together rupture and incorporation, obedience and faithfulness, divine providence and human response.

Future research should pursue two trajectories. First, empirical studies could operationalize the OFT framework to examine how contemporary communities navigate the relationship between obedience, faithfulness, and transformation, particularly among migrant and diaspora congregations.

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Second, comparative exegetical work could bring Ruth 1:16–17 into dialogue with other biblical declarations of allegiance, such as the covenant renewal formulas in Joshua and the confession formulas in the Pauline corpus, to test the framework's transferability across canonical contexts. Such work would strengthen the bridge between exegesis and practical theology that this study has sought to build, and would further clarify how obedience and faithfulness function as foundations for life transformation in both ancient text and contemporary practice.

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