

## THE BOOK OF

# RUTH

Commentary by **ROBERT JAMIESON**

## CHAPTER 1

### RUTH 1:1-5.

#### **ELIMELECH, DRIVEN BY FAMINE INTO MOAB, DIES THERE.**

1. *in the days when the judges ruled* — The beautiful and interesting story which this book relates belongs to the early times of the judges. The precise date cannot be ascertained.

2. *Elimelech* — signifies “My God is king.”

*Naomi* — “fair or pleasant”; and their two sons, Mahlon and Chilion, are supposed to be the same as Joash and Saraph (<sup><BIB></sup>1 Chronicles 4:22).

*Ephrathites* — The ancient name of Beth-lehem was Ephrath (<sup><BIB></sup>Genesis 35:19 48:7), which was continued after the occupation of the land by the Hebrews, even down to the time of the prophet Micah (<sup><BIB></sup>Micah 5:2).

*Beth-lehem-judah* — so called to distinguish it from a town of the same name in Zebulun. The family, compelled to emigrate to Moab through pressure of a famine, settled for several years in that country. After the death of their father, the two sons married Moabite women. This was a violation of the Mosaic law (<sup><BIB></sup>Deuteronomy 7:3 <sup><BIB></sup>23:3 <sup><BIB></sup>Ezra 9:2 <sup><BIB></sup>Nehemiah 13:23); and Jewish writers say that the early deaths of both the young men were divine judgments inflicted on them for those unlawful connections.

⌘ RUTH 1:6-18.

NAOMI RETURNING HOME, RUTH ACCOMPANIES HER.

**6, 7. *Then she arose with her daughters-in-law, that she might return from the country of Moab*** — The aged widow, longing to enjoy the privileges of Israel, resolved to return to her native land as soon as she was assured that the famine had ceased, and made the necessary arrangements with her daughters-in-law.

**8. *Naomi said unto her two daughters-in-law, Go, return each to her mother's house*** — In Eastern countries women occupy apartments separate from those of men, and daughters are most frequently in those of their mother.

***the Lord deal kindly with you, as ye have dealt with the dead*** — that is, with my sons, your husbands, while they lived.

**9. *The Lord grant you that ye may find rest*** — enjoy a life of tranquillity, undisturbed by the cares, incumbrances, and vexatious troubles to which a state of widowhood is peculiarly exposed.

***Then she kissed them*** — the Oriental manner when friends are parting.

**11. *are there yet any more sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands?*** — This alludes to the ancient custom (<sup>⌘</sup>Genesis 38:26) afterwards expressly sanctioned by the law of Moses (<sup>⌘</sup>Deuteronomy 25:5), which required a younger son to marry the widow of his deceased brother.

**12, 13. *Turn again, my daughters, go your way*** — That Naomi should dissuade her daughters-in-law so strongly from accompanying her to the land of Israel may appear strange. But it was the wisest and most prudent course for her to adopt: first, because they might be influenced by hopes which could not be realized; second, because they might be led, under temporary excitement, to take a step they might afterwards regret; and, third, because the sincerity and strength of their conversion to the true religion, which she had taught them, would be thoroughly tested.

**13. *the hand of the Lord is gone out against me*** — that is, I am not only not in a condition to provide you with other husbands, but so reduced in circumstances that I cannot think of your being subjected to privations with me. The arguments of Naomi prevailed with Orpah, who returned to her people and her gods. But Ruth clave unto her; and even in the pages of Sterne, that great master of pathos, there is nothing which so calls forth the sensibilities of the reader as the simple effusion he has borrowed from Scripture — of Ruth to her mother-in-law [CHALMERS].

<del>RUTH</del> **RUTH 1:19-22.**

**THEY COME TO BETH-LEHEM.**

**19-22. *all the city was moved about them*** — The present condition of Naomi, a forlorn and desolate widow, presented so painful a contrast to the flourishing state of prosperity and domestic bliss in which she had been at her departure.

**22. *in the beginning of barley harvest*** — corresponding to the end of our March.

## CHAPTER 2

### **RUTH 2:1-3.**

#### **RUTH GLEANS IN THE FIELD OF BOAZ.**

**2. *Ruth ... said unto Naomi, Let me now go to the field, and glean*** — The right of gleaning was conferred by a positive law on the widow, the poor, and the stranger (see on **Leviticus 19:9** and **Deuteronomy 24:19**). But liberty to glean *behind the reapers* [**Ruth 2:3**] was not a right that could be claimed; it was a privilege granted or refused according to the good will or favor of the owner.

**3. *her hap was to light on a part of the field belonging unto Boaz*** — Fields in Palestine being unenclosed, the phrase signifies that portion of the open ground which lay within the landmarks of Boaz.

### **RUTH 2:4-23.**

#### **HE TAKES KNOWLEDGE OF HER, AND SHOWS HER FAVOR.**

**4. *Boaz came from Beth-lehem, and said unto the reapers, The Lord be with you*** — This pious salutation between the master and his laborers strongly indicates the state of religious feeling among the rural population of Israel at that time, as well as the artless, happy, and unsuspecting simplicity which characterized the manners of the people. The same patriarchal style of speaking is still preserved in the East.

**5. *his servant that was set over the reapers*** — an overseer whose special duty was to superintend the operations in the field, to supply provision to the reapers, and pay them for their labor in the evening.

**7. *she said ... Let me glean and gather after the reapers among the sheaves*** — Various modes of reaping are practiced in the East. Where the crop is thin and short, it is plucked up by the roots. Sometimes it is cut with the

sickle. Whether reaped in the one way or the other, the grain is cast into sheaves loosely thrown together, to be subjected to the process of threshing, which takes place, for the most part, immediately after the reaping. Field labors were begun early in the morning — before the day became oppressively hot.

*she tarried a little in the house* — that is, the field tent, erected for the occasional rest and refreshment of the laborers.

**8, 9. *said Boaz unto Ruth, ... bide here fast by my maidens*** — The reaping was performed by women while the assortment of sheaves was the duty of men-servants. The same division of harvest labor obtains in Syria still. Boaz not only granted to Ruth the full privilege of gleaning after his reapers, but provided for her personal comfort.

**9. *go unto the vessels, and drink of that which the young men have drawn*** — Gleaners were sometimes allowed, by kind and charitable masters, to partake of the refreshments provided for the reapers. The vessels alluded to were skin bottles, filled with water — and the bread was soaked in vinegar (<sup>(~~RUTH~~)</sup>Ruth 2:14); a kind of poor, weak wine, sometimes mingled with a little olive oil — very cooling, as would be required in harvest-time. This grateful refectation is still used in the harvest-field.

**14. *he reached her parched corn, and she did eat, and was sufficed, and left*** — some of the new grain, roasted on the spot, and fit for use after being rubbed in the hands — a favorite viand in the East. He gave her so much, that after satisfying her own wants, she had some (<sup>(~~RUTH~~)</sup>Ruth 2:18) in reserve for her mother-in-law.

**16. *let fall also some of the handfuls of purpose for her*** — The gleaners in the East glean with much success; for a great quantity of corn is scattered in the reaping, as well as in their manner of carrying it. One may judge, then, of the large quantity which Ruth would gather in consequence of the liberal orders given to the servants. These extraordinary marks of favor were not only given from a kindly disposition, but from regard to her good character and devoted attachment to her venerable relative.

**17. *and beat out that she had gleaned*** — When the quantity of grain was small, it was beat out by means of a stick.

***an ephah*** — supposed to contain about a bushel.

**20. *the man is ... one of our next kinsmen*** — *Hebrew*, “one of our redeemers,” on whom it devolves to protect us, to purchase our lands, and marry you, the widow of his next kinsman. She said, “one of them,” not that there were many in the same close relationship, but that he was a very near kinsman, one other individual only having the precedence.

**21. *all my harvest*** — both barley and wheat harvests. The latter was at the end of May or the beginning of June.

**22. *Naomi said unto Ruth ... It is good ... that thou go out with his maidens*** — a prudent recommendation to Ruth to accept the generous invitation of Boaz, lest, if she were seen straying into other fields, she might not only run the risk of rude treatment, but displease him by seeming indifferent to his kind liberality. Moreover, the observant mind of the old matron had already discerned, in all Boaz’ attentions to Ruth, the germs of a stronger affection, which she wished to increase.

## CHAPTER 3

### ◀RUTH 3:1-13.

#### BY NAOMI'S INSTRUCTIONS, RUTH LIES AT BOAZ'S FEET, WHO ACKNOWLEDGES THE DUTY OF A KINSMAN.

**2. *he winnoweth barley to-night in the threshing-floor*** — The winnowing process is performed by throwing up the grain, after being trodden down, against the wind with a shovel. The threshing-floor, which was commonly on the harvest-field, was carefully leveled with a large cylindrical roller and consolidated with chalk, that weeds might not spring up, and that it might not chop with drought. The farmer usually remained all night in harvest-time on the threshing-floor, not only for the protection of his valuable grain, but for the winnowing. That operation was performed in the evening to catch the breezes which blow after the close of a hot day, and which continue for the most part of the night. This duty at so important a season the master undertakes himself; and, accordingly, in the simplicity of ancient manners, Boaz, a person of considerable wealth and high rank, laid himself down to sleep on the barn floor, at the end of the heap of barley he had been winnowing.

**4. *go in, and uncover his feet and lay thee down*** — Singular as these directions may appear to us, there was no impropriety in them, according to the simplicity of rural manners in Beth-lehem. In ordinary circumstances these would have seemed indecorous to the world; but in the case of Ruth, it was a method, doubtless conformable to prevailing usage, of reminding Boaz of the duty which devolved on him as the kinsman of her deceased husband. Boaz probably slept upon a mat or skin; Ruth lay crosswise at his feet — a position in which Eastern servants frequently sleep in the same chamber or tent with their master; and if they want a covering, custom allows them that benefit from part of the covering on their master's bed. Resting, as the Orientals do at night, in the same clothes they wear during the day, there was no indelicacy in a stranger, or even a woman, putting the extremity of this cover over her.

**9. *I am Ruth thine handmaid: spread therefore thy skirt over thine handmaid; for thou art a near kinsman*** — She had already drawn part of the mantle over her; and she asked him now to do it, that the act might become his own. To spread a skirt over one is, in the East, a symbolical action denoting protection. To this day in many parts of the East, to say of anyone that he put his skirt over a woman, is synonymous with saying that he married her; and at all the marriages of the modern Jews and Hindus, one part of the ceremony is for the bridegroom to put a silken or cotton cloak around his bride.

**15. *Bring the veil that thou hast upon thee, and hold it*** — Eastern veils are large sheets — those of ladies being of red silk; but the poorer or common class of women wear them of blue, or blue and white striped linen or cotton. They are wrapped round the head, so as to conceal the whole face except one eye.

**17. *six measures of barley*** — *Hebrew*, “six *seahs*,” a *seah* contained about two gallons and a half, six of which must have been rather a heavy load for a woman.



# CHAPTER 4

## RUTH 4:1-5.

### BOAZ CALLS INTO JUDGMENT THE NEXT KINSMAN.

1. *Then went Boaz up to the gate of the city* — a roofed building, unenclosed by walls; the place where, in ancient times, and in many Eastern towns still, all business transactions are made, and where, therefore, the kinsman was most likely to be found. No preliminaries were necessary in summoning one before the public assemblage; no writings and no delay were required. In a short conversation the matter was stated and arranged — probably in the morning as people went out, or at noon when they returned from the field.

2. *he took ten men of the elders of the city* — as witnesses. In ordinary circumstances, two or three were sufficient to attest a bargain; but in cases of importance, such as matrimony, divorce, conveyancing of property, it was the Jewish practice to have ten (<sup><1208></sup>1 Kings 21:8).

3. *Naomi ... selleth a parcel of land* — that is, entertains the idea of selling. In her circumstances she was at liberty to part with it (<sup><1255></sup>Leviticus 25:25). Both Naomi and Ruth had an interest in the land during their lives; but Naomi alone was mentioned, not only because she directed all the negotiations, but because the introduction of Ruth's name would awaken a suspicion of the necessity of marrying her, before the first proposition was answered.

4. *there is none to redeem it beside thee; and I am after thee* — (See on <sup><1256></sup>Deuteronomy 25:5). The redemption of the land of course involved a marriage with Ruth, the widow of the former owner.

## RUTH 4:6-8.

### HE REFUSES THE REDEMPTION.

**6. *The kinsman said, I cannot redeem it ..., lest I mar mine own inheritance*** — This consequence would follow, either, first, from his having a son by Ruth, who, though heir to the property, would not bear his name; his name would be extinguished in that of her former husband; or, secondly, from its having to be subdivided among his other children, which he had probably by a previous marriage. This right, therefore, was renounced and assigned in favor of Boaz, in the way of whose marriage with Ruth the only existing obstacle was now removed.

**7, 8. *a man plucked off his shoe*** — Where the kinsman refused to perform his duty to the family of his deceased relation, the widow was directed to pull off the shoe with some attendant circumstances of contemptuous disdain. But, as in this case, there was no refusal, the usual ignominy was spared; and the plucking off the shoe, the only ceremony observed, was a pledge of the transaction being completed.

## RUTH 4:9-12.

### HE MARRIES RUTH.

**9. *Boaz said unto the elders Ye are witnesses this day, that I have bought all that was ... Chilion's and Mahlon's, of the hand of Naomi*** — Although the widow of Chilion was still living, no regard was paid to her in the disposal of her husband's property. From her remaining in Moab, she was considered to have either been married again, or to have renounced all right to an inheritance with the family of Elimelech.

**10. *Ruth the Moabitess ... have I purchased to be my wife*** — This connection Boaz not only might form, since Ruth had embraced the true religion, but he was under a legal necessity of forming it.

**11. *all the people and the elders, said, We are witnesses*** — A multitude, doubtless from curiosity or interest, were present on the occasion. There

was no signing of deeds; yet was the transfer made, and complete security given, by the public manner in which the whole matter was carried on and concluded.

*the Lord make the woman that is come into thine house like Rachel and like Leah* — This was the usual bridal benediction.

**12. *let thy house be like the house of Pharez*** — that is, as honorable and numerous as his. He was the ancestor of the Beth-lehem people, and his family one of the five from which the tribe of Judah sprang.

## RUTH 4:13-18.

### SHE BEARS OBED.

**17. *Obed*** — means “servant.”

**18-22. *these are the generations of Pharez*** — that is, his descendants. This appendix shows that the special object contemplated by the inspired author of this little book was to preserve the memory of an interesting domestic episode, and to trace the genealogy of David. There was an interval of three hundred eighty years between Salmon and David. It is evident that whole generations are omitted; the leading personages only are named, and grandfathers are said, in Scripture language, to beget their grandchildren, without specifying the intermediate links.