

# RUTH

## RUTH 1-2 — BACK TO THE HOMELAND

### CHAPTER 1

This beautiful story is an event occurring during the Judges (1:1), but separated from the former to give prominence to the genealogical record with which it concludes (4:18-22), showing Ruth an ancestress of David and hence of Jesus Christ.

The story is so simply told that it needs only the briefest comments. Elimelech and his family are called "Ephrathites of Bethlehem-judah" (1:2) for the reason that Ephrath was originally the name of Bethlehem (<sup>(1359)</sup>Genesis 35:19; 48:7; Mic. 5:2), and also because there was a Bethlehem in Zebulun as well as Judah (<sup>(1395)</sup>Joshua 19:15).

The marrying of Moabite women by the sons of Elimelech was contrary to the Mosaic law (<sup>(1308)</sup>Deuteronomy 7:3; 23:3), but such disobedience was common in those times, as we have seen.

Why Naomi should not have encouraged her daughters-in-law to return with her (v. 8) is explained by the thought that they would fare better in material things in their own land and among their own people. Her piety was not of the depth to make her feel that the spiritual benefits of Israel would offset these advantages.

The utterances of Naomi in verses 11-13 are explained by the ancient custom (Gem 38:11), sanctioned by the law of Moses (<sup>(1285)</sup>Deuteronomy 25:5), requiring a younger son to marry the widow of a deceased brother.

Naomi seems not to have been a cheerful person (vv. 13, 20-21), but were we in her circumstances perhaps we would not have felt differently. And then she may have had reason to believe her affliction a divine chastisement upon her household.

**CHAPTER 2:1-17**

Verse 2 reminds us of <sup>(LEV)</sup>Leviticus 19:9-10 and <sup>(DEUT)</sup>Deuteronomy 24:19-21, giving the right to the poor and to strangers to glean after the reapers; but we are not to suppose that Ruth purposely selected the field of Boaz, or that she had knowledge at this time of her relationship to him.

Reaping was done by women (v. 8), but the gathering and threshing was the work of men. How beautifully the character of Boaz shows in these verses! His greeting to the reapers, his interest in his relatives, his attention and generosity toward them, and his confidence in Jehovah. What poetry of faith in the expression, "The Lord God of Israel, under whose wings thou are come to trust!" (v. 12.)

**CHAPTER 2:18-23**

Naomi recognizes the relationship of Boaz, and the phrase, "one of our next kinsmen," might be rendered, "one of them that hath the right to redeem for us" (<sup>(LEV)</sup>Leviticus 25:25). This "right to redeem" carried with it the duty to protect them, to purchase their tribal lands, and in this case to marry Ruth and maintain the family name. Naomi's advice to Ruth, therefore, can readily be understood and appreciated (v. 22).

**QUESTIONS**

1. During what period did the history of Boaz and Ruth occur?
2. What gives special prominence to the Book of Ruth?
3. What was the original name of Bethlehem, and how many towns of that name were in Israel?
4. What law was violated by the sons of Elimelech?
5. What was involved in the kinsman's right of redemption?

**RUTH 3-4 — A BLESSED BRIDE****CHAPTER 3:1-2**

The rest Naomi would secure for Ruth is that of a husband and a home. Threshing-floors were commonly on the field where the grain was reaped, the process consisting in throwing it against the evening wind, the farmer

remaining all night on the field for that purpose as well as to protect his property.

### CHAPTER 3:3-6

The indelicacy of these verses is removed by the fact that it was the custom thus to remind a kinsman of his duty in such a case. The openness of the location is also to be kept in mind, together with the circumstance that Orientals sleep by night in the clothing worn during the day, reclining simply upon a cloak or rug. Servants frequently sleep in the same tent with their master, lying crosswise at his feet, and if a covering be needed are allowed to draw the skirt of his covering over them.

### CHAPTER 3: 7-18

Spreading the skirt over one is in the East a symbol of protection, and in the case of a man's doing it for a woman equivalent to a marriage contract.

Rising while it was still dark, Ruth could without immodesty remove the veil from her face to receive in it the generous gift of barley for her and her mother-in-law. The word veil might be rendered apron or sheet, which in the case of poorer women, was linen or cotton and wrapped around the head so as almost entirely to conceal the face.

Note Boaz testimony to Ruth's character from one point of view (v. 11), and Naomi's testimony to his from another (v. 18).

### CHAPTER 4:1-8

The gate was something like the town hall with us, where all the legal business was transacted. It was a building with a cover but without walls, and a place which everybody passed by. It was easy to find a jury of ten men there any time; and as soon as the kinsman came in sight whose duty it was first to redeem before Boaz, calling him to wait, the case was entered upon with simplicity and informality (vv. 1-4). (For the law governing this matter, see <sup><BR25></sup>Leviticus 25:25.)

The kinsman was disposed to take the land until he learned that he must take Ruth with it when he changed his mind (vv. 4-6). (For the law, see <sup><BR21></sup>Deuteronomy 25:25.) How it would have marred his inheritance to have married Ruth is not clear (v. 6), except it be that a son born to him by

her could not have carried his name but that of his brother, or possibly her Moabitish nationality alarmed him because of its contrariness to the Mosaic law. Boaz believes that the law is suspended in Ruth's case, who has become a proselyte to the Jewish faith, but the other kinsman does not.

The shoe symbolized a possession which one had, and could tread with his feet at pleasure. Hence when the kinsman pulled off his shoe and gave it to Boaz, he surrendered to him all claims to the possession which would have been his under other circumstances.

### CHAPTER 4:9-17

Verses 11-12 seem to be a bridal benediction. Rachel and Leah had been greatly blessed with offspring and Pharez was honored as an ancestor of the Bethlehemites (v. 18).

The blessing of Ruth is regarded as that of Naomi as well (v. 14), for in the former's child her house will be raised up again. This is set forth in the name, Obed, which means "one that serves," i.e., one that serves Naomi.

In the conclusion of this verse we have the words in which the whole book reaches its culmination, the completion of the blessing pronounced on Ruth by Boaz (2:18). Thus the coming of the King is prepared for, on whom the Lord had determined to confirm the dominion over His people for evermore. And the converted Moabites, who entered as worthy members into the commonwealth of God's people, became the mother of David and of Christ.

There is an interval of 380 years between Solomon and David (vv. 20-22). Whole generations are omitted and only leading characters are named.

### QUESTIONS

1. Describe an Eastern threshing floor, and the process of threshing.
2. How would you explain the indelicacy in verses 3-6?
3. How did Boaz testify to Ruth's character?
4. With what may the gate of an oriental city be compared?
5. For what reasons may the nearer kinsman have declined to purchase this land?
6. What did the shoe symbolize?