

The Book of RUTH

INTRODUCTION

1. Title. The book of Ruth forms an appendix to the book of Judges, and an introduction to the following two historical books of Samuel. It receives its title from the name of the person whose story it tells. Hebrew proper names have meanings. These are lost to the reader of the English translation of the Bible, because the translators have simply transliterated the proper names without attempting to give their meanings. Ruth was a Moabitish woman, and naturally her name is not Hebrew. The derivation and meaning of the name are uncertain, though some think it may be related to the verb *ra'ah*, "to associate with," and thus mean "friend," or "friendship."

The book of Ruth gives us, not the story of romantic love, but of the reverential love of a young widow for the mother of her deceased husband. The love portrayed in the character of Ruth is of the purest, most unselfish, and extraordinary kind. Though a Moabitess, Ruth accepted Naomi's faith as her own, and was rewarded by marriage to a Jewish nobleman, Boaz, by whom she became the ancestress of David, and thus, eventually, of Christ.

2. Authorship. Critics have debated the authorship of the book of Ruth. As in the case of the book of Daniel, there are some who set the date of writing early and some who set it much later. The theory of a postexilic origin for Ruth is ably presented in the *Jewish Encyclopedia*. Some critics have assumed that the book represents a subtle argument in favor of intermarriage between the Jews and other peoples, since it states that David descended from such a marriage. They suggest that it was written in the time of Ezra and Nehemiah as a protest against their stringent laws prohibiting marriage between Jews and non-Jews. The five chief reasons set forth by those who believe that the book of Ruth was written in postexilic times are these:

1. The expression "in the days when the judges ruled" (ch. 1:1) implies a later date for the writing of the book.
2. The fact that the book of Ruth appears in the third section of the Hebrew canon implies late composition.
3. The book contains a number of Aramaisms which would not appear in a pre-exilic narrative.
4. The genealogy at the close of the book shows definite influence of the priestly school.
5. The expression "in former time" (ch. 4:7) seems to imply that the shoe ceremony and the redemption of land and women were no longer practiced.

These arguments are, however, far from conclusive. The expression "in the days when the judges ruled" implies no more than that the book of Ruth, as we have it, was written after the close of the period of the judges, but not necessarily *long* after. It is interesting to note that in one of the oldest versions, the LXX, this book is added to the book of Judges without even a separate title, as if it were truly the concluding part of Judges, a kind of appendix. The position of Ruth in the present Hebrew canon is no valid argument for the lateness of its composition. The present Hebrew canon is itself of late origin, and the position of the book of Ruth in the early versions is the same as that in which we find it in the KJV, after the book of Judges and in some cases with no separate heading of its own. A detailed study has shown that the Aramaic words to which the critics have pointed as proof of a late origin occur also in other writings whose pre-exilic

dating is uncontested. The genealogy at the close of the book of Ruth would not be satisfactory proof of postexilic origin unless it first be granted that certain portions of the books of Moses and Joshua are also of postexilic origin. The expression “in former time” may imply that the shoe ceremony and the redemption of land and of widows are of the past, but not necessarily of the *long*-forgotten past. In fact, a careful study of the book of Ruth has led many scholars to the conclusion that the book is likely to have been of pre-exilic origin. This is doubtless all that can be said as to the date of the writing of the book of Ruth.

The written form of the book of Ruth, as we now have it, probably originated in the time of David himself, and it seems to fit best in the early days of his reign. Some have thought that Samuel was the author of the story in its present form. This would explain the position of the book of Ruth at the close of the book of Judges and preceding Samuel (see on Judges 17:1; 18:29). Its position in the later Hebrew canon would naturally be among the Writings, since it could not appropriately be included among the books of Moses or among the prophets. According to Jewish tradition, as recorded in the Talmud, the prophet Samuel wrote not only the books bearing his name but also the book of Judges and that of Ruth. Though not itself a prophecy, the book of Ruth may accordingly have been written by one of the greatest of prophets.

3. Historical Setting. The setting of the story is explicitly stated in the opening words of the book: “In the days when the judges ruled, . . . there was a famine in the land.” Yet this statement is by no means definite, for there was more than one famine in the land of Palestine during the time of the judges. However, by comparing the genealogy of David as given in the last verses of the book of Ruth with David’s genealogy as given in the first chapter of Matthew, we discover Boaz’ mother listed as Rahab. There are no compelling reasons for supposing this to be any other than the Rahab of Jericho (see on Matt. 1:5). If she was his own mother, the book of Ruth would come rather early in the period of the judges. On the other hand, ancient tradition, followed by Josephus, places the events of the book of Ruth in the time of Eli, which would better fit Boaz as David’s great-grandfather. Either could be true, since “mother” and “father” can also mean grandparent or ancestor (see on 1 Kings 15:10; Ezra 7:1).

The picture of customs, society, and government reflected in the book of Ruth agrees with that given of the period of the judges as set forth in the book of Judges itself. This becomes more evident as one studies the details of the Ruth narrative. The suggestion that the famine mentioned is the one that occurred in the time of Gideon is most improbable, for there is no indication that the famine recorded in the book of Ruth was caused by armed invaders (Ruth 1:1, 2; cf. Judges 6:3–6). The book gives no hint of war; in fact, when Naomi decided to return home, it was because she heard that Jehovah had visited His people and given them bread (see on Ruth 1:6). This implies that the famine was not the result of war but of drought.

As already stated, the Greek translators of the Old Testament Scriptures made this book an appendix to the book of Judges, with no division or title of its own. Later editions of this translation, the LXX, inserted *Telos ton kriton*, “the end of the Judges,” to indicate where the break came between Judges and Ruth, and *Telos tes Routh*, “the end of Ruth,” at the close of the narrative. The book of Ruth occupies a different place in the present Hebrew canon. It is one of five rolls read in the synagogue on five special occasions or festivals during the year. In printed editions of the Hebrew Old Testament

these rolls are usually arranged in the following order: Canticles, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, and Esther. Ruth occupies the second position because the book was appointed to be read at the Feast of Weeks, later known as Pentecost, the second of the five special festivals.

As already noted, translators of the LXX appended Ruth to the book of Judges. This corresponds well with the time of Eli, the high priest, in the latter days of whose life Samuel was called to the prophetic office. An important act of Samuel's life was the anointing of Saul, the first king of Israel. The last words of the book of Judges read, "In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (Judges 21:25).

Moab was, at this time, a district east of the Dead Sea, between the river Arnon and the brook Zered. Its eastern boundary was indefinite, being the great desert of Arabia. This region is a high, fertile tableland, averaging some 3,000 ft. (914.6 m.) above the level of the Mediterranean Sea and 4,300 ft. (1,311 m.) above the level of the Dead Sea. Though the rainfall is usually sufficient to mature the crops, people living in the uplands augment their supply of water by means of cisterns. Many of those used in ancient times are now in ruins. Formerly the population must have been far greater than now. The fertility of the country in ancient times is indicated by the numerous towns and villages known to have existed there, and mentioned in the Scriptures. The land of Moab still provides good pasture for sheep and cattle, as it did in ancient times.

The Moabites were of Semitic stock, being descendants of Lot, Abraham's nephew. Their chief deity was Chemosh, who seems to have been propitiated by human sacrifices (see 2 Kings 3:26, 27). We know but little of the history of the Moabites after the account of their origin, given in Gen. 19, until the time of the Exodus. Some time before the establishment of the kingdom in Israel, the Amorites occupied that part of Moab lying north of the Arnon, but Israel subdued the Amorites and occupied their part of what had been Moabite territory (see Num. 21:26; Judges 11:12–27; see on Num. 21:13; 22:1). When Balak, the son of Zippor, saw that the Israelites encamped upon the very borders of his country, he entered into an alliance with the Midianites and called in the aid of the apostate prophet Balaam.

An inscription of Ramses II on the base of a statue at Luxor boasts of the conquest of Moab. Israel was oppressed by Eglon of Moab, with the aid of Ammon and Amalek (Judges 3:13, 14), but Eglon was assassinated by Ehud, and the Moabite yoke was cast off. King Saul smote Moab, but did not subdue it (1 Sam. 14:47), for we find David placing his father and mother under the protection of the king of Moab when he was pursued by Saul (1 Sam. 22:3, 4). The fact that David's great-grandmother, Ruth, was a Moabitess may explain why David would place his father and mother under the protection of the king of Moab when he fled from King Saul. But this friendship between David and Moab did not continue. When David became king he made war on Moab and completely defeated it.

There were two Bethlehems in ancient Palestine. One was situated in territory assigned to the tribe of Zebulun, the other in Judah. Because of possible confusion the writer of the book of Ruth definitely notes twice, at the very beginning of his account, that the Bethlehem of Naomi and her husband, Elimelech, and their two sons was Bethlehem-judah (ch. 1:1, 2). The Bethlehem in Zebulun is mentioned in Joshua 19:15 as one of the 12 cities in the inheritance of the children of Zebulun. There is still a small

village in northern Palestine at the place where this Bethlehem is thought to have been situated. But it is the Bethlehem in Judah that interests us. It is a town of some 15,000 inhabitants, 5 1/4 mi. (8.4 km.) south of Jerusalem and about 2,400 ft. (731.7 m.) above sea level. It occupies an outstanding position on a spur running east from the watershed. It is just off the main road to Hebron and the south. The position is one of natural strength, and was occupied by a garrison of Philistines in the days of David (2 Sam. 23:14; 1 Chron. 11:16).

4. Theme. There is narrative that is historic, and narrative that is epic. The word *epic* is applied to narrative whose appeal is not primarily to our sense of information but to our creative imagination and to the emotions. An epic is usually written in poetic form. A peculiarity of Hebrew poetry, however, is that its verse system is based on parallelism of thought rather than on exact meter and rhyme. This characteristic also appears, to a lesser extent, in Hebrew prose. Thus, in Hebrew, the classification of literature depends more on the nature of the thought than on the form of expression. Hebrew epics are portions of the national history fitted into their proper place in the narrative. Appreciation of the Bible as literature calls for a recognition of the different forms of narrative used by Bible writers.

The chief purpose of the book of Ruth is to give information concerning the immediate ancestors of David, the greatest of the kings of Israel, the one in whose line was to come the Messiah. Christ is to be the eventual ruler of the kingdom of Israel after the spirit, the leader of the eternal theocracy. Christ spoke of His kingdom as the kingdom of heaven, to distinguish it from the kingdoms of this present world. The book of Ruth thus provides a cheering link in the inspired narrative of the kingdom Christ came to establish.

At the same time Ruth presents a most appealing picture of the blessings of the ideal home. There are two institutions that have come down to us from before the fall of man—the Sabbath and the home. The home was established by God Himself on the sixth day of the first week of time, and the Sabbath on the seventh day of the same week. The Sabbath is not Jewish, for, as the Creator Himself said, “The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath” (Mark 2:27). Both the Sabbath and the home have become the special objects of Satan’s attacks.

The relationship of mother-in-law and daughter-in-law is a subject of amusement to many. But not so that of Ruth and her mother-in-law, Naomi. After a sojourn of ten years in the land of Moab, Naomi, whose husband and two sons had died, learned that a condition of plenty again prevailed in the land of Judah, and decided to return. Ruth, with a devotion that speaks almost as much for Naomi as it does for Ruth herself, broke all ties of home and kindred to accompany her. With a last look at the fertile fields of her homeland, Moab, and with an impassioned outburst to Naomi, “Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God,” she entered a strange land, united with God’s true people, and became a worshiper of the God of heaven. This devotion to her mother-in-law resulted, finally, in her becoming one of the progenitors of David, the sweet psalmist of Israel; Solomon, the wisest of the sons of men; Zerubbabel, the later Moses; and the Messiah, the son of David. Finally the story is replete with superb examples of faith, piety, humility, industry, and loving-kindness revealed in the ordinary occurrences of life.

Thus we have in the story of Ruth, not only a charming gem of Hebrew literature, but also a significant comment on a part of the genealogy of Christ (see on Matt. 1:4–6).

Israel should have been prepared by a study of this narrative to understand God's plan for the salvation of individuals of all nations who would do as Ruth the Moabitess did—accept the God whose character had been represented to them by His servants. It was God's plan that many would thus be so transformed in character as to be prepared individually to become citizens of the eternal kingdom of Christ (see COL 290).

5. Outline.

- I. Sojourn in the Land of Moab, 1:1–18.
 - A. Naomi loses her husband and two sons, 1:1–5.
 - 1. Famine in the land of Judah, 1:1.
 - 2. Elimelech, Naomi, and their sons go to Moab, 1:2.
 - 3. Death of Elimelech, 1:3.
 - 4. Marriage and death of the two sons, 1:4, 5.
 - B. Naomi plans to return to Judah, 1:6–14.
 - 1. Reason for her return, 1:6.
 - 2. Suggestion that the daughters-in-law stay, 1:7–9.
 - 3. Reason for Naomi's suggestion, 1:10–13.
 - 4. Different decisions of the two girls, 1:14.
 - C. Ruth decides to go with her mother-in-law, 1:15–18.
 - 1. Naomi's plea to Ruth, 1:15.
 - 2. Ruth's moving reply, 1:16, 17.
 - 3. Naomi's acquiescence, 1:18.
- II. Journey and Arrival at Bethlehem, 1:19–22.
 - A. The people of Bethlehem welcome Naomi and Ruth, 1:19.
 - B. Naomi's reply, 1:20, 21.
 - C. The time of their arrival, 1:22.
- III. Ruth Meets Boaz, 2:1–23.
 - A. Ruth gleans in the field of Boaz, 2:1–7.
 - 1. Naomi has a kinsman, 2:1.
 - 2. Ruth goes gleaning, 2:2, 3.
 - 3. Chief servant of Boaz tells him about Ruth, 2:4–7.
 - B. Conversation between Boaz and Ruth, 2:8–13.
 - 1. Boaz shows favor to Ruth, 2:8, 9.
 - 2. Ruth inquires the reason for this favor, 2:10.
 - 3. Boaz repeats the good things that he has heard about Ruth, 2:11, 12.
 - 4. Ruth expresses her thanks, 2:13.
 - C. Dinner and afternoon work, 2:14–17.
 - 1. Ruth's share in noon meal, 2:14.
 - 2. Ruth's special privileges and afternoon gleaning, 2:15–17.
 - D. Ruth's return to her mother-in-law, 2:18–23.
 - 1. Ruth bring back grain and food, 2:18.
 - 2. Naomi asks where Ruth has been, 2:19.
 - 3. Naomi explains that Boaz is a close relative, 2:20, 21.
 - 4. Future plans for Ruth's gleaning, 2:22, 23.
- IV. Naomi Seeks a Home for Ruth, 3:1–18.
 - A. Naomi explains her plan to Ruth, 3:1–5.
 - B. Ruth carries out the plan, 3:6–13.

- C. The gift and instruction of Boaz to Ruth, 3:14, 15.
- D. Ruth returns again to her mother-in-law, 3:16–18.
- V. How Ruth Became David’s ancestress, 4:1–22.
- A. Boaz proposes that the nearer of kin redeem the inheritance of Elimelech, 4:1–6.
- B. On his refusal, Boaz proposes to redeem it, 4:7–12.
- C. Naomi and her grandson Obed, 4:13–17.
- D. Genealogy of David’s ancestors, 4:18–22.

CHAPTER 1

1 *Elimelech driven by famine into Moab, dieth there. 4 Mahlon and Chilion, having married wives of Moab, die also. 6 Naomi returning homeward, 8 dissuadeth her two daughters in law from going with her. 14 Orpah leaveth her, but Ruth with great constancy accompanieth her. 19 They two come to Bethlehem, where they are gladly received.*

1. When the judges ruled. The story about to be told is placed in the setting of the time covered by the book of Judges. At the close of the book we are told that Boaz and Ruth became progenitors of David (ch. 4:13–22). Matt. 1:5 lists Rahab as the mother of Boaz. If Rahab of Jericho was his mother, the events of the book of Ruth occurred early in the time of the Judges. Rahab may have married one of the Israelites, perhaps one of the spies whom she had saved. When Ruth came to Bethlehem, Boaz was no longer young, for he commended her on not following “young men” (ch. 3:10). Since the entry into Canaan probably occurred in 1405 B.C., and judges ruled Israel from about the time of Joshua’s death, it is possible that the events of this narrative occurred before 1300 B.C. However, it could have been much later, or the genealogy from Boaz to David may have been abbreviated (see on Matt. 1:5; Ezra 7:1; on “father” meaning “grandfather” or “ancestor,” see on 1 Kings 15:10).

A famine. Palestine had been subject to periodic drought for centuries (see on Gen. 12:10; see also Gen. 26:1; 45:5–11). God had promised “rain in due season”; that it now failed implies unfaithfulness on the part of Israel (Lev. 26:3, 4; cf. 1 Kings 17:1; 18:18). A drought that affected the territory of Judah would not necessarily affect the tableland of Moab, to the east of the Dead Sea. Moab was blessed with an abundant supply of water, a rich soil, and semitropical vegetation. Its people spoke a language closely akin to that of the Hebrews.

Went to sojourn. As had Abraham (Gen. 12:10), Isaac (Gen. 26:1), and Jacob (Gen. 46:1–4), for the same reason.

Moab. The Moabites were descendants of Lot, and thus akin to the Israelites. For their origin, see on Gen. 19:36, 37; for later relations with the Israelites, see on Num. 22:2–4.

2. Elimelech. This name, meaning “My God is king,” reflects piety on the part of Elimelech’s parents. It may even suggest that at the time of the birth of Elimelech some Israelites were already talking of appointing a king like the nations about them. If so, the parents of this boy made it clear that they were on the side of those who recognized that God Himself was Israel’s only rightful king.

Naomi. The parents of the young woman who became Elimelech’s wife had called their little girl “my pleasantness.” Hebrew parents rejoiced particularly at the birth of a son, but the parents of this little girl expressed heartfelt joy at the birth of a daughter.

Mahlon. There is some difference of opinion as to the meaning of this name, as also regarding that of his brother. One possible meaning of Mahlon is “sickly.” Some might contend that his early death confirms this as the meaning of the name.

Chilion. Possibly this name means “pining.” It may be that neither this boy nor his brother appeared sturdy at birth.

Ephrathites. Ephratha was an older name for Bethlehem, the “house of bread” (see on Gen. 35:19 and Matt. 1:5). Natives of that town would therefore be called Ephrathites. “Judah” is here added to “Beth-lehem” to distinguish this Bethlehem from that in Zebulun (Joshua 19:15).

4. Took them wives. It was probably after the death of their father that Mahlon and Chilion married. This was not entirely in their own interest alone, for the wives would be of real help to Naomi; also, sons born to them would perpetuate the deceased father’s name.

Orpah. Some think that the name Orpah means “stubborn.” Others suggest that it comes from *‘ephrah*, “fawn,” or “hind.” This interpretation requires transposing letters. The cognate Arabic root means “ornamented richly with hair.”

Ruth. As to the meaning of this name, see p. 423. The name does not appear elsewhere in the OT.

5. Left. Here used by the translators in an archaic sense. We would say “bereft.” There is no reason for concluding that the suffering that came to Naomi was a punishment of God because of sin. The idea of suffering as punishment was popular among the Jews (see John 9:2). It was to correct this false notion that Moses wrote that was probably the first book of the OT to be written—the book of Job. Moses himself suffered disappointment for 40 years in Midian before God considered him ready to lead Israel. In a similar way Naomi’s sufferings prepared her to lead Ruth to the Promised Land—both figuratively and literally. God may permit suffering in order that our characters may be prepared for service and for citizenship in His kingdom.

6. She arose. That is, she prepared to leave. Naomi rises from the calamity that had overtaken her in the land of Moab. Courage to do so came when she learned that God had indeed blessed His people by giving them bread.

7. She went forth. Let it be said of us, as it was of Naomi, that we set out from where we are and turn our steps in the direction God would have us go. Let us too set out for the heavenly Canaan. And as we are on our way may it be our privilege to take some with us who will say, “Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God” (v. 16).

8. Return. We should not misunderstand Naomi’s action. The three widows were already “on the way” (v. 7). Perhaps arrival at the borders of Moab impressed upon Naomi the sacrifice Orpah and Ruth were making in leaving their homeland and their friends. It was unselfish love for her daughters-in-law that prompted Naomi to urge each of them to return to her parents’ home. Oriental custom bound them to her, but she refused to press her claim to their service. She would not compel them to begin life anew in a strange land, but left them free to marry again and to set up their own homes. They need not devote their lives to taking care of the mother of their dead husbands, as would ordinarily have been expected of them. Naomi was an ideal mother-in-law; she did not press even her legitimate claims upon her daughters-in-law, but left them entirely free to make their own choices. In so doing, Naomi stands forth as an example all mothers-in-law would do well to emulate.

9. *That ye may find rest.* Meaning “that you may find a home” (RSV). The rest of which Naomi spoke was not to be found in the homes of their mothers, but in homes of their own—“each . . . in the house of her husband.” When the Jews spoke of a woman finding “rest” they referred to her marriage (see also Ruth 3:1). The following words of Naomi to her daughters-in-law explain still further Naomi’s meaning. She was not in a position to supply them with husbands, as provided by the law of levirate marriage (see Gen. 38:8–11; Deut. 25:5–10; Matt. 22:23–26). The word translated “rest” is *noach*, from a verb meaning “to settle down,” “to remain.” *Noach* is the Hebrew for Noah.

10. *Surely we will return.* Social custom would have obliged the two young women to remain with Naomi and to lay their plans as she should direct. Verses 11 and 12 imply the additional custom that required a man to marry his brother’s wife and thereby perpetuate his brother’s name and family (see Deut. 25:5–10).

11. *Why will ye go?* Although it was their duty to go, Naomi here implied that the choice was to be theirs and not hers. She implicitly relinquished her rightful claims to their submission and graciously left the decision up to them. This no doubt represented considerable sacrifice on her part, for she was “too old to have an husband” herself (v. 12) and would, in the normal course of events, look to the two younger women to provide for her and to serve her in her old age.

12. *Turn again.* For the third time Naomi appeals to Orpah and Ruth to return (see vs. 8, 11). Naomi was in earnest about the matter. This third appeal was sufficient to persuade Orpah (v. 14), but Ruth declined even when a fourth was made (v. 15).

I am too old. Naomi apparently felt the infirmities of age creeping upon her, and did not feel equal to the task of establishing a new home and rearing children. It would seem, also, that the disappointments of life bore heavily upon her (see v. 20). Nevertheless, she was resigned to her lot; she was self-reliant and confident that God would provide (see Ps. 37:25).

13. *Would ye tarry?* Orpah and Ruth would themselves be late in middle life before further sons born to Naomi—should she immediately marry and bear sons—could reach maturity.

It grieveth me. In spite of her own sorrow of heart (see v. 20), Naomi’s thoughts turn to the sorrow of her two daughters-in-law, who are, after all, in the same situation as she is herself. Naomi fears she is too old to establish another home (v. 12), but they are young and all of life is before them (see Joel 1:8). Ruth is specifically called a *na’arah*, a “girl,” not only by Boaz (ch. 2:5, 6), but by the townsfolk of Bethlehem as well (ch. 4:12). Apparently she had scarcely entered upon the mature years of life. Should their entire lives be blighted, Naomi reasons, simply to assuage her own grief and to provide for her needs?

For your sakes. Here is the secret of Naomi’s loveliness of character, of her appeal to Ruth—her first thoughts were ever of others. Though Naomi felt keenly her own loss (v. 20), yet the experience had not warped her outlook on life. Her sense of values was still in balance. In her life was reflected the likeness of Christ, who ordered His own life “for their sakes” (John 17:19). To seek the well-being of others is “the great principle which is the law of life for the universe” (DA 21). There is no greater power than the influence exerted by an unselfish life. “A kind, courteous Christian is the most powerful argument that can be produced in favor of Christianity” (GW 122).

14. Wept again. Compare v. 9. Partly in mutual sorrow because of their widowhood, partly on account of the emotional tension occasioned by the decision that must now be made.

Clave. Or, “clung” to her. Ruth could not bear to be separated from one whose beauty of character had inspired her own soul with high ideals and had given her something she felt was worth living for—even if she never again had a home of her own. Happy the mother-in-law today who attracts rather than repels her daughters-in-law. Every mother-in-law may study and meditate with profit on the character of Naomi. She is the outstanding character of this narrative.

15. Is gone back. Though attracted to Naomi, like Ruth, Orpah felt herself bound even more closely to Moab. Orpah’s return made Ruth’s decision more difficult, for now she stood alone.

Unto her gods. The god of the Moabites was Chemosh (see on Num. 21:29). Orpah may have temporarily adopted her husband Chilion’s religion (see Ruth 4:10), but if so, had now returned to idolatry.

16. Intreat me not. These words introduce Ruth’s decisive answer to Naomi’s suggestion that she follow Orpah’s example, and return to her own people. Ruth’s answer is the keynote of the whole book. It is not merely that Ruth’s love for her mother-in-law leads her to cleave to Naomi. Ruth has discovered that it is Naomi’s faith that makes her a wonderful woman. Ruth resolutely makes her decision for the true God: “Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God.” No more sublime affirmation of love and devotion is to be found anywhere.

Thy God my God. Ruth’s only knowledge of the true God was what she had seen of Him reflected in Naomi and the other members of Naomi’s family. It is ever thus that God reveals Himself to men—by a demonstration of the power of His love operating in the lives of erstwhile sinners. The transforming power of divine love is the best argument in favor of the truth. Without it our profession is no better than “sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal” (1 Cor. 13:1).

17. The Lord do so to me. Here Ruth uses the sacred name, Jehovah. She puts herself on oath, and invokes the punishment of the God of the Israelites if she should let anything less than death part her from Naomi. The original Hebrew has the definite article “the” with “death.” Ruth refers to “the death” that comes to all.

Ruth uses the regular Hebrew formula for an oath, one that appears again and again in the OT. In 1 Sam. 3:17 Eli invokes God’s punishment against Samuel if he should hide from Eli anything that God had shown him when He called Samuel by name. This experience marks the beginning of Samuel’s ministry as a prophet. If Samuel wrote the book of Ruth, as conservative Bible scholars have rather generally thought, then this similarity in language becomes particularly meaningful. It appears also in 1 Sam. 25:22, where David himself uses this formula as an oath that he will destroy Nabal and all those belonging to his household. David again uses this formula in his oath to make Amasa captain of the host (2 Sam. 19:13). A paraphrase of what Ruth said would run like this: “I swear by the true God that death alone shall separate me from you.” Ruth stood the supreme test. She proved to be more of a Jewess at heart than she was a Moabitess. A change had taken place during her association with Naomi, and she knew she would feel more content and more at home in the strange land of Israel than she would in the

familiar land of Moab, and among her lifelong friends. A knowledge of the true God binds human hearts more closely together than do the ties of race or kindred.

18. *Stedfastly minded.* A noble character trait indeed. Neither the urging of Naomi nor the example of Orpah could change Ruth's determination to cast her lot with Naomi and Naomi's God.

19. *They came to Beth-lehem.* We do not know where in Moab, Naomi and her family sojourned, nor whether they entered Moab from the north or from the south. In any event, the return to Bethlehem meant a descent of about 4,500 ft. (1,372 m.) from the highlands of Moab to the level of the Dead Sea, and an ascent of about 3,750 ft. (1,143.3 m.) to Bethlehem—in a distance of perhaps 75 mi. (120 km.). How fast Ruth and Naomi could travel, and how much they could carry, we do not know. But in those days women were accustomed to travel on foot, and to carry much heavier loads than women of Western lands would think of trying to carry now.

The city was moved. Though Naomi had been absent for perhaps ten years, she still had many friends and relatives in Bethlehem. This was, after all, her home. In Bible times any town surrounded by a wall was called a "city"—even though it might be very small by modern standards (see on Joshua 6:1–3). Joshua enumerates 124 such "cities" (ch. 15:21–62). Bethlehem apparently had a wall around it, for mention is made of a gate where the official business of the city was transacted (Ruth 4:1).

Is this Naomi? The question the townsfolk of Bethlehem asked does not necessarily infer that they had difficulty in recognizing her, though the experiences through which she had passed may have appreciably affected her appearance. In her reply Naomi spoke of the bitterness (v. 20) of her affliction (v. 21), particularly with respect to the fact that she "went out full" and returned "home again empty" (v. 21). Naomi was not so much concerned with material possessions as with the fact that she returned alone. Therefore when the townsfolk asked, "Is this Naomi?" they were in effect exclaiming, "Is this Naomi, returning alone, as a widow?" It seemed incredible that not only her husband but also both sons had died.

ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

16 COL 290, 301; PK 19

CHAPTER 2

1 *Ruth gleaneth in the fields of Boaz. 4 Boaz taking knowledge of her 8 sheweth her great favour. 18 That which she got, she carrieth to Naomi.*

1. *Boaz.* Possibly meaning "fleetness." Another possible derivation is from *bo* and *'az*, meaning "in him [is] strength." This was the name of one of the pillars of Solomon's temple (1 Kings 7:21). Boaz was apparently a man of wealth and considerable influence in the city of Bethlehem. He may have been the son of Rahab of Jericho (see on Matt. 1:5).

2. *Let me now go.* Ruth had learned of the custom of providing for the poor by permitting them to glean in the fields of the rich (see Lev. 19:9, 10; Deut. 24:19–22). Since Ruth and Naomi had come "in the beginning of barley harvest" (Ruth 1:22) and Ruth gleaned "unto the end of barley harvest" (ch. 2:23), it is apparent that Ruth went to work soon after their arrival (see on v. 6). The fact that Naomi herself did not go out to glean implies either weariness from the journey or the infirmities of age. The first test of Ruth's character came with the decision to leave her homeland. Now she gives evidence

of the sincerity of her motives by taking the initiative and laboring diligently to provide for the needs of Naomi.

Glean. That is, gather grain missed by the harvesters. God had appointed the gleanings for the poor, the fatherless, the widow, and the stranger, or non-Israelite (see on Lev. 19:9). Ruth was thus doubly qualified, as being “poor” and a “stranger” (Lev. 23:22). Provision was thus made for supplying the needy with the necessities of life, and for teaching those more favorably situated lessons of unselfishness and compassion. Furthermore, the needy had to work for what they received, and did not become merely the passive recipients of charity. This preserved their self-respect and encouraged initiative and industry.

Corn. Literally, “grain”—not Indian maize, commonly called “corn” in the United States. This was the time of the barley harvest (chs. 1:22; 2:23), which, in the highlands of Judea, came during the months of April-May.

3. Her hap. Or, “she happened” (RSV), literally, “chanced her chance.” Providence guided Ruth to the field of Boaz, one of her deceased husbands’ near relatives (chs. 2:1; 3:2, 12, 13). How often, if we but knew, the circumstances and experiences of life that seem to “happen” to us are in reality providential (see Ps. 27:13, 14; DA 224, 330, 668). God is interested in us personally and individually.

The field. That is, the entire cultivated area around Bethlehem—all the fields, whether belonging to Boaz or other townfolk. The Hebrew word thus translated is more general in nature than the English word “field.” In ch. 1:1, 2, 6, 22, it is translated “country” (see on Deut. 14:22).

4. The Lord be with you. The usual greeting of a pious Jew, and responded to with another customary form of greeting. Both reflect a pious application of religious thought to the situations of daily life.

5. Whose damsel? Boaz apparently recognized the other gleaners, of whom he spoke as “my maidens” (v. 8). The owner’s permission seems to have been needed for gleaning (v. 7). Perhaps those who gleaned in a certain field ordinarily did so by invitation. The owner might thus reserve gleaning rights for those he considered most deserving. Obviously Boaz, though a close relative, had not yet met Ruth.

6. It is the Moabitish damsel. The servant speaks as if the coming of Ruth was a matter of common knowledge. The fact that Boaz, though “near of kin” (v. 20), had not yet met Ruth, implies that Ruth began gleaning soon after her arrival in Bethlehem (see on v. 2).

7. I pray you. See on v. 5.

Trarried a little in the house. Or, “without resting even for a moment” (RSV). This is the reading of the LXX, the Syriac, and the Vulgate. The Hebrew text in its present form is not clear, as is evident from the KJV. In Oriental lands farmers live in villages or towns, and the fields they till are out in the surrounding countryside, often at some considerable distance. In going out to glean, Ruth had left “the city” (vs. 2–4), and at night she returned to it (vs. 17, 18), but not during the day.

8. My daughter. From the viewpoint of his more advanced years (ch. 3:10) Boaz might appropriately address Ruth as “daughter.”

Abide here. Boaz recognized the special degree of responsibility to which his relationship to her bound him. No one else would grant her the favorable opportunity to glean that he gave her. Boaz’ “maidens,” or gleaners, followed immediately behind the

reapers, gathering up what they may have missed. The gleaner who followed closest would naturally have the best opportunity.

9. *They do reap.* That is, the young men, “the reapers” (v. 7). The Hebrew pronoun is masculine.

After them. That is, the “maidens” (v. 8) whose task it was to bind up the sheaves. Here the pronoun is feminine.

Not touch thee. Not only did Boaz take care to provide Ruth with a favorable opportunity for gleaning; he also provided for her personal safety. This was apparently necessary, particularly in view of the fact that she was a stranger and unprotected. Furthermore, in telling her to help herself to the drinking water, he took thought of her personal comfort.

10. *Fell on her face.* Ruth expresses her gratitude to Boaz for his evident kindness toward her. On her part, Ruth is surprised that Boaz is so gracious to her, a “stranger,” that is, a “foreigner.” She expected no favors.

11. *Fully been shewed me.* Though he had not previously met Ruth, Boaz was fully informed concerning her.

12. *The Lord recompense.* Boaz invokes upon Ruth the blessing of Jehovah.

Under whose wings. This metaphor is of the young chickens running to their mother to be sheltered from danger, from storm, or from cold. This metaphor is a favorite expression with Ruth’s descendant, David (see Ps. 17:8; 36:7; 63:7), and is used by Christ also (see Matt. 23:37). Boaz speaks with great modesty and piety. He realizes himself, and wishes Ruth to understand, that the God of the Israelites, whom she has accepted as her God, is the only one who can give her the reward she deserves.

13. *Let me find favour.* Or, “you are most gracious to me” (RSV).

14. *Vinegar.* Heb. *chomeş*, from *chameş*, “to be sharp,” “to be sour.” “Vinegar” was a sour wine or sauce used as a relish. This was probably the same “vinegar” as that offered Christ on the cross (Ps. 69:21; Matt. 27:34).

Was sufficed. Amid all the unusual favors bestowed upon her, Ruth did not cease to be herself. She did not forget her mother-in-law, but saved for her a part of the good dinner she herself had had. It is in perfect keeping with Oriental custom even today to take home a portion of what one does not eat. When we ourselves have taken deep draughts of Christ’s love, we find that an infinite supply remains. It is our privilege to take of this and bring it to others who may be hungry and thirsty for a knowledge of the truth as it is in Christ Jesus.

Left. Not that she left the field (see v. 17), but that she “had some left over” (RSV).

15. *When she was risen.* It seems that Ruth went back to her gleaning before the “young men” returned to their harvesting. She worked longer than they did, and gleaning was not an easy task.

Reproach her not. Ruth might see some straggling ears of grain that the binders had failed to bind into the sheaves. If she were to glean these, the young men were not to embarrass her by any word of censure that would indicate they so much as noticed it. His instructions to the harvest crew give further evidence of the special consideration Boaz deliberately showed Ruth. Perhaps he was already thinking of Ruth’s right to ask him to marry her, and thereby preserve the estate and the house of her deceased husband. Naomi’s appraisal of Boaz’ conduct implies that she thus understood his unusual kindness to Ruth. The way was prepared for Naomi to explain the Jewish custom of

levirate marriage, whereby a deceased husband's nearest relative was to marry his widowed wife (see on Deut. 25:5).

17. *Until even.* Ruth seems to have worked diligently all day long (see v. 7). In the afternoon gleaning proved to be an easier task than in the morning. But Ruth did not on that account cease gleaning sooner. Only at even did she pause to beat out what she had gathered.

An ephah. Equivalent to about 5 gal., or 30 lb.

19. *Blessed be he.* Naomi was duly impressed with the results of the day's toil. The amount of grain indicated that the owner of the field where Ruth gleaned had been unusually kind to her. His kindness became still more evident when Ruth gave Naomi the remainder of her noontime meal—what she had saved of the food Boaz had graciously given her (v. 14). In view of the favor shown Ruth, Naomi invokes God's blessing on Ruth's generous benefactor.

Boaz. See on v. 1.

20. *One of our next kinsmen.* What Naomi doubtless explains to Ruth is not simply that Boaz is a relative, but that, as a near kinsman, he has the right of redeeming Elimelech's property, probably already sold for debt (see on Lev. 25:24). Naomi's first thought is of the family inheritance. Ruth does not yet understand what the "right" to "redeem" (Ruth 4:6) involves in Jewish social law, but she does hasten to tell Naomi how Boaz had urged her to remain in his field throughout the harvest. Naomi heartily approves of Boaz' earnest invitation to Ruth to continue gleaning in his field (see ch. 2:22).

The word translated "kinsmen" is from the root *ga'al*, meaning "to redeem," "to ransom," "to recover," that is, by the settlement of outstanding obligations. The participle is *go'el*, a "near relative." Preceded by the definite article it becomes *haggo'el*, "nearest kinsman," as in ch. 4:1.

There were several important responsibilities that, according to Jewish law and custom, devolved upon a near kinsman. It was his duty to: (1) Buy back the property a near kinsman had sold to a creditor, or to someone else, to meet the creditor's demands, as in Lev. 25:25; Ruth 4:4, 6; Jer. 32:7. (2) "Redeem" one near of kin who had of necessity sold himself into servitude, as in Lev. 25:48, 49. (3) Avenge the blood of a near kinsman, if slain by an enemy, as in Num. 35:19; where *go'el* is translated "revenger." (4) Marry the childless widow of a near kinsman, as in Ruth 3:13, and become trustee of the property on behalf of the offspring of this union.

Bible writers adopted the figure of the near kinsman as a "redeemer" and applied it to God as *the Redeemer* of man from sin and death. Job, for instance, said, "I know that my redeemer [*go'el*] liveth" (Job 19:25)—the one who would redeem him from the grave at the resurrection. Isaiah uses *ga'al* and *go'el* 18 times in reference to God as the Redeemer of Israel from their foes, and of men from the clutches of sin (see Isa. 43:1, 14; 44:22; 49:7, 54:5, 8; 63:16; etc.). Well may we rejoice in Christ, our near Kinsman, who accepted on our behalf the responsibilities implied in that relationship. He it is who has redeemed us from the power of sin and of death (Isa. 44:22; Hosea 13:14). If we but come to Him, He will not decline as did Ruth's next of kin (Ruth 4:6); He will in no wise

cast us out (John 6:37). And in coming to Him we will find “rest” unto our souls (Ruth 3:1; Matt. 11:29).

22. Meet thee not. So long as she remained in the fields of Boaz, Ruth was under the protection of a strong and trustworthy friend. Furthermore, he was generous. Elsewhere, among strangers, she might be molested.

23. Harvest. It was at the time of harvest that Ruth received her reward from the nearest of kin, her “redeemer.” For us “the harvest is the end of the world” (Matt. 13:39). Then our Redeemer will come to take us home with Him.

ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

20 DA 327

CHAPTER 3

¹ *By Naomi's instructions, 5 Ruth lieth at Boaz's feet. 8 Boaz acknowledgeth the right of a kinsman. 14 He sendeth her away with six measures of barley.*

1. Rest. Or, “a home” (RSV). By the word “rest” Naomi refers to marriage (see on ch. 1:9). Naomi felt it her duty to do what she could to provide a home for the daughter-in-law who had so loyally followed her, and accordingly explained to Ruth her right, according to Jewish custom, to call upon Boaz to perform the duties of a near kinsman. If Boaz agrees to marry her, Ruth will not only have a home of her own but will also be able to perpetuate the name and preserve the heritage of her deceased husband.

There are two institutions that come down to us from Eden: (1) the Sabbath, a *time* of “rest,” when, in a special way, we dwell upon the evidences of God's love for us and study how we may more perfectly express our love toward Him; and (2) the home, a *place* of “rest,” where love for one another should find its truest and most complete expression.

2. He winnoweth barley. In Palestine the winnowing of grain was accomplished, as it is today, by tossing it high into the air with a shovel or a fork, or from a shallow vessel or a sieve, so that the grain would of its own weight fall in one place and the chaff be carried away by the wind. Winnowing was usually done in the cool of the evening.

The threshing floor. In a Palestinian harvest the process of separating the grain from the straw was generally carried on at a threshing floor under the open sky (see Judges 6:37). This was usually a large, hard, flat, circular area of ground 40 or 50 ft. in diameter. Either the whole sheaves or the ears cut from the sheaves were spread upon the earthen floor, and oxen were driven about the floor to trample out the kernels. Sometimes a sled weighted with stones was pulled by the oxen as they circled the floor. After winnowing, the grain was finally passed through a sieve to free it from grit and dirt. Then it was stored, ready for grinding.

3. Raiment. Or, “best clothes” (RSV).

Get thee down. Bethlehem is close to the crest of the mountain range of central Judea, on the narrow slope of a long ridge that falls away rather steeply to the east. Most of the “fields” of Bethlehem probably lay below the town, and Ruth would literally go “down” to reach them (see on ch. 4:1).

4. Mark the place. According to ch. 2:17, Ruth gleaned until evening, and did not leave for home until she had threshed and winnowed her gleanings. Toward evening Boaz' workmen also threshed and winnowed the grain they had gleaned that day, and evening by evening the pile of winnowed grain increased in size. All probably ate supper together and then went home, but someone must remain all night to guard the increasing

pile of winnowed grain against theft. Naomi knew that now, at the end of the barley harvest, Boaz himself would be on hand. There would be an unusually good evening meal, and Boaz would spend the night, probably, in a tent pitched beside what was now a large pile of winnowed grain. That night Ruth did not go home as usual, but waited unobtrusively till Boaz had had time to fall asleep in the tent. In the darkness she would not be observed.

Uncover his feet. Or, “lift up the clothes that are on his feet,” according to the LXX and the Vulgate. Boaz probably lay on a pile of straw, dressed, but with his shoes off, and his mantle spread over his body for a covering.

7. His heart was merry. A Targum reads, “He [Boaz] blessed the name of Jehovah.” The word here translated “merry” is often used to express happiness and a sense of well-being, and in no way implies that Boaz was intoxicated. With a plentiful harvest at hand, following the years of famine, he could well be thankful for the bounties of heaven.

8. Afraid. The LXX renders the word as “troubled.” Would not any upright man be troubled, or “startled” (RSV), under circumstances such as these?

9. Thy skirt. Literally, “thy wing,” an expression commonly used of the loose, flowing upper garment. The Jewish Talmud explains Ruth’s action as a proposal for marriage (see on Deut. 22:30). It is said that a similar custom still exists in some parts of the world. Ruth’s plea may have reminded Boaz of what he had recently said to her: “The Lord recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust” (Ruth 2:12). Ruth calls upon Boaz to fulfill in a personal way his own prayer that God would bless her. A gracious and devout man, Boaz promises to fulfill Ruth’s request, in case the nearer kinsman does not consent to do the kinsman’s duty.

Thou art a near kinsman. Ruth makes the basis of her request clear. Her coming to Boaz is both right and honorable.

10. Blessed be thou. The first words of Boaz express his high esteem for Ruth and the favor with which he looks upon her request. Moreover, he invokes the blessing of God and expresses his desire that the proposal of Ruth be carried out in harmony with the will of God.

My daughter. The form of address Boaz used in speaking to Ruth when they first met (ch. 2:8), probably based on some considerable difference of age between the two of them.

Shewed more kindness. Boaz graciously accepts Ruth’s proposal as an act of kindness toward himself, whereas what Ruth asked for was in reality an act of kindness and mercy toward her and her deceased husband. By this statement Boaz removed any measure of embarrassment Ruth may have felt from taking the initiative in proposing marriage. Boaz denies any reluctance on his part to carry out the proposal.

At the beginning. That is, toward Naomi.

Followedst not young men. Boaz was obviously no longer a young man himself. Before Boaz had known who Ruth was, at the beginning of the harvest season, he had spoken of her as a *na‘arah*, a “young girl” (ch. 2:5, 6). The townsfolk of Bethlehem later used the same term of her at the time of her marriage to Boaz (ch. 4:12). The fact that a young woman of her years would look upon him, a man probably well advanced in middle life, greatly impressed Boaz.

11. *Fear not.* Boaz is not in a position to give Ruth an immediate and definite answer, for the reason he forthwith proceeds to explain (vs. 12, 13). In other words, there must inevitably be some delay. Boaz cannot accede to her request at the moment, but she is not to think that in so doing he is evading the issue. So he bids her, “Fear not.” He has already expressed his intentions in the matter, and has done so sincerely. But to avoid gossip and perhaps criticism, Boaz considers that the only proper course is to wait until the “kinsman nearer than I” shall first be given the opportunity of meeting the obligation that logically devolves upon him. Should Boaz do otherwise, the nearer kinsman would probably consider himself grievously wronged and might even take legal action against Boaz. The only safe and proper course was to follow the procedure approved by law and custom.

I will do. In spite of postponing the matter, Boaz gives Ruth a categorical promise—a promise limited only by the possible choice of the other kinsman to exercise his prerogatives with respect to Ruth.

All the city. Though a widow and a foreigner who has resided in Bethlehem but a few weeks, Ruth is already known and respected by all. It would seem that Elimelech had been an influential and respected citizen of Bethlehem, and that the townsfolk naturally interested themselves in the affairs and fortunes of his family. Furthermore, the arrival of a foreigner would attract attention, and everyone would observe her carefully during those first few weeks. Ruth had stood the test. She was recognized as a “virtuous woman.” In mentioning this fact Boaz expresses still more emphatically his own high regard for Ruth.

12. A kinsman nearer than I. The degree of relationship was apparently the determining factor. It was not *any* kinsman who might claim the right to Ruth’s affections and her property. The nearer the kinsman, presumably, the greater would be his interest to protect the rights and privileges of the widow and her deceased husband. Conversely, he was presumed to be less influenced by selfish interests.

13. Tarry this night. Boaz sets a definite time limit to his request for a delay in fulfilling Ruth’s request. It would be but a few hours at the most (see on v. 11).

If he will perform. See on v. 12.

Lie down until the morning. In effect Boaz said to her, “You have made clear the object of your plea, and I fully assent; but do not run the risk of going back to your mother-in-law now, in the dead of the night.”

14. Before one could know. At the very first light of dawn, before the arrival of the harvesters and the gleaners. The few who would be about would be unable to recognize Ruth anyway.

Let it not be known. Not only for propriety’s sake, but also to safeguard the plan of Boaz to complete arrangements with the nearer kinsman. Should he learn of the events of the preceding night, he might refuse to relinquish his prior rights.

A woman. Literally, “the woman.” Probably influenced by the use of the definite article, and considering it unlikely that Boaz was sleeping alone that night near the threshing floor, the Talmud considers that the command must have been addressed to some of the reapers who remained with him in the field. It would have been most unpleasant for all concerned should any suspicion attach to his relationship to Ruth.

15. The veil. Rather, “the mantle” (RSV). The Hebrew word thus translated does not designate a covering for the face, but rather an upper garment consisting of a large,

square piece of cloth thrown over the left shoulder and then brought over or under the right arm (see on Deut. 22:17).

Six measures. This would be approximately 1 1/4 bu. (1/2 hectoliter). Ruth bound this tightly in her mantle, or “vail,” and no doubt carried it on her head, or possibly on her shoulder. It was probably about as much of a load as she could conveniently carry over the hilly path into the city (see on v. 3).

16. She said. That is, Naomi said.

Who art thou? This is the literal reading of the Hebrew. But it is obvious that Naomi knew this to be Ruth, for immediately she adds the words “my daughter.” Taking Naomi’s question as an idiomatic expression, various translators make of it an inquiry as to the success of Ruth’s mission, for instance, “How did you fare, my daughter” (RSV)? The context seems to warrant such a translation, for in reply Ruth tells her all that had happened.

17. Go not empty. Boaz knew well that Ruth’s visit had been suggested by Naomi, and his gift of the six measures of barley was intended as a tacit recognition of that fact. It bespoke an acknowledgment of Naomi’s interest in the matter, and implied that his personal interest in Ruth would not lead him to forget Naomi.

18. Sit still. Or, “wait” (RSV). Ruth had done all she could; the kinsman, Boaz, must make the legal arrangements for their marriage. The law was not so much concerned with the personal desires of the woman, it would seem, as with those of the near kinsman. All he needed to do was to establish his rights to the satisfaction of the jury of citizens that he would be able to gather at the city gate.

How the matter will fall. Or, “how the matter turns out” (RSV). To wait patiently for an important issue to be resolved is never easy, particularly when there is nothing a person can do to influence the decision, except to pray about it. This, we may presume, Ruth did (see ch. 1:16).

CHAPTER 4

1 *Boaz calleth into judgment the next kinsman.* 6 *He refuseth the redemption according to the manner in Israel.* 9 *Boaz buyeth the inheritance.* 11 *He marrieth Ruth.* 13 *She beareth Obed the grandfather of David.* 18 *The generation of Pharez.*

1. Up to the gate. As previously noted (see on ch. 3:3), Bethlehem is situated on a narrow ridge that projects eastward from the central mountain range. The ridge falls away abruptly in terraced slopes to deep valleys on the north, east, and south. Today these terraces are covered with rows of olive trees and interspersed with fig trees and vines. To reach the gate of the city, Boaz would leave the field where he had spent the night and ascend the slopes of the ridge. The city gate, probably the only opening in the wall, was the place where court sessions were held and where public business was transacted (see Deut. 21:19–21; cf. Ps. 127:5; Zech. 8:16). Jerome notes that “the judges sat in the gates that the country-people might not be compelled to enter the cities and suffer detriment. Sitting there, they [the judges] could meet the townsmen and the country-people as they left or entered the city; and each man, his business finished, could retire at once to his own house.”

Sat him down. The fact that Boaz sat in the gate probably made evident that he sought a judicial decision. Boaz proceeded to assemble a jury of the elders of the city, according to the law of Moses (Deut. 16:18).

2. He took ten men. Presumably the number required to make up a citizen jury for civil cases. It seems that Boaz himself made the selection; however, he had first hailed the near kinsman (v. 1), and probably consulted with him in making the selection. The procedure followed was most democratic. The case was clear, a decision was reached on the basis of Mosaic law without delay, and the decision was confirmed and witnessed by a representative group of the recognized leading men of Bethlehem. Legal business was thus settled without lawyers and without extended legal arguments.

The elders. The elders of a town were probably the heads of the various major family groups. They were responsible for the civil and religious interests of the people who lived there. The “elders” were not necessarily aged men, but men of maturity and experience.

3. Selleth. Such a sale was not a permanent transfer of property, but a temporary one. Naomi and Ruth, though unable to till the land themselves, could thus receive some income from it. The original owners might buy the land back at any time by paying the unexpired portion of the sale price; otherwise, it would automatically revert to them at the year of jubilee (see on Lev. 25:23–25).

Our brother. Not necessarily a blood brother. The relationship implied by the Hebrew word thus translated is far more flexible than its English equivalent. Even friends are sometimes called brothers. The statement of Boaz to the effect that the land belonged to Elimelech implies that the two sons, Mahlon and Chilion, had not yet been given their inheritance. Therefore it is Naomi, and not Ruth, who sells the land. Nevertheless, a child of Ruth would legally fall heir to Elimelech’s land, and Naomi is therefore ready to transfer title to the property of her deceased husband to the kinsman who would marry Ruth. This kinsman would hold the land in trust until a child born to Ruth should become eligible to inherit it in his own right.

The fact that the land was to be sold—leased, we would say today—to a near kinsman who would marry Ruth and hold it in trust for her offspring by this union, called for the application of two provisions of the Mosaic civil code. The laws on the transfer of land (Lev. 25:23–28) and the marriage of a widow to a near kinsman (Deut. 25:5–10) both applied to the case, with the latter placing a limitation upon the former.

4. To advertise thee. Literally, “to uncover your ear,” or “to tell you of it” (RSV).

If thou wilt. Should the nearer kinsman decide to purchase the property, it was his privilege to do so. Boaz would be without recourse.

I am after thee. After setting forth the facts and recognizing the rights of the nearer kinsman, Boaz clearly reveals his personal interest in the matter. He expresses hope that the nearer kinsman will not purchase the property.

I will redeem it. Realizing that this is a good opportunity to increase his income, the nearer kinsman feels no hesitancy about purchasing the land.

5. Then said Boaz. Thus far nothing had been said concerning Ruth’s part in the transaction. Boaz apparently felt it best to make the property the main issue, perhaps considering that a more favorable response might thus be secured. But now that the nearer kinsman has expressed his intention to purchase the property Boaz reveals the fact that Naomi has limited the sale of the land by requiring the purchaser to marry Ruth.

The order in which Boaz brought up the two aspects of the case implies that he was more interested in Ruth than in the land. This would be a typically Eastern approach to the problem, for Oriental psychology would lead Boaz to hold in the background that which was of major concern to him, and seek to arrange a satisfactory settlement without

making his own interest in the matter the determining factor. In contrast, the nearer kinsman's interest was centered exclusively on the land as a source of profit.

6. *Lest I mar.* The eagerness of the nearer kinsman to purchase the land when the sole factor involved appeared to be profit, and his immediate loss of interest upon learning of the possibility of self-sacrifice and financial loss, seem to mark him as an avaricious man, like the rich fool of Luke 12:13–21. The nearer kinsman is not willing to marry Ruth. Evidently he had no children of his own to inherit his property. If he should marry Ruth, the first child he might have by her would be counted as the children of Ruth's deceased husband. Then both the parcel of land that he might buy from Naomi, and also the kinsman's own property, could pass to Ruth's children. The fact that Ruth was a Moabite seems not to have affected his decision.

On his part Boaz may have had two reasons for desiring to buy the parcel of land and to marry Ruth. He may have been a widower with one or more grown sons. It is also evident that Boaz sincerely respected and loved Ruth. He did not mind the fact that the child he might have by her would be counted the child of her deceased husband, and that the property that he purchased from Naomi would go to her children and not to the children he may have had by a previous wife. Furthermore, Boaz was obviously not affected by prejudice. His own mother may have been Rahab of Jericho (see on ch. 1:1).

7. *In former time.* See on v. 8.

To confirm all things. Literally, "to confirm any transaction." The procedure noted in this verse is not out of harmony with the law of Deut. 25:7–9, which is concerned with a woman who finds no kinsman of her deceased husband willing to perform the duty of a kinsman. Consequently, she takes the initiative against the kinsman who refuses *her* proposal. He confirms his refusal by allowing the woman to pluck off his shoe. According to Jewish commentators, however, the woman spits on the ground before his face, which the Hebrew construction would allow.

But in the case of Boaz the situation was different. Ruth had asked him to marry her, and he was ready to do so. The request to the nearer kinsman was not being made by the woman whose husband had died. Boaz was evidently granting the other kinsman the chance to marry Ruth if he wanted to do so, a prerogative that was his by law.

A testimony. That is, legally acceptable as evidence.

8. *Drew off his shoe.* It is clear from the context that it was the nearer of kin who took off his own shoe or sandal and gave it to Boaz, thereby confirming the transfer of his right of redemption to Boaz. The author of Ruth is not necessarily explaining a ceremony that was not understood by his readers, as some commentators think. He simply notes that in this case the contemptuous part of the ceremony was omitted.

9. *Ye are witnesses.* Boaz calls upon the citizen jury and all others standing by to witness the act of transfer symbolized by the ceremony of the sandal. As the nearer kinsman had the prior right to marry Ruth and administer her property, so also he had the right to decline to do so (Deut. 25:7–9).

10. *Purchased.* The purchase of Naomi's property was the legal point at issue, but in this particular instance more was involved than merely the land itself (see on vs. 5, 6). Furthermore, Boaz was more interested in Ruth than he was in the land (see on v. 5), a fact that he now makes clear. It was necessary for him to purchase the land in order to make Ruth his wife. The nearer kinsman had shown himself unwilling to take Ruth in

order to come into possession of the land, but Boaz was willing to take the land, if necessary, in order to win her hand.

Raise up. That is, to perpetuate his family line (see Deut. 25:6).

Upon his inheritance. The family allotment of land was considered the sacred, inalienable right of the original owner and his posterity. It might never be sold in perpetuity. For a piece of land to be, in a sense, an orphan, was similar to a man being without an heir. The preservation of the family name and inheritance became a vital factor in the maintenance of the social structure of the nation (see Num. 36:1–9 and on Matt. 1:1).

11. We are witnesses. The assembly at the gate did not reprove the nearer of kin. For him they had no word of censure; for Boaz, however, they had words of congratulation and blessing.

Like Rachel and like Leah. See Gen. 29:31 to 30:24.

12. The house of Pharez. See Gen. 38:12–29. This statement prepares the way for the genealogy of vs. 18–22, which would seem therefore not to be a later editorial addition but an integral part of the story in its original form.

13. The Lord gave. The Hebrew people recognized the fact that all life comes from God, and that He is the giver of “every good gift and every perfect gift” (James 1:17; cf. John 3:27). It is He who “gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons” (Acts 14:17; see also Deut. 11:14) and “power to get wealth” (Deut. 8:17, 18). We should ever recognize God as the one from whom all our blessings flow and to whom our gratitude should ascend.

14. The women. Apparently a group of close friends present at the ceremony of circumcision, when the child would be given its name (see Luke 1:58, 59).

A kinsman. Or, a “redeemer” (see on ch. 2:20).

His name. That is, the son’s name.

15. A restorer of thy life. The birth of a son to Ruth assured Naomi that her family line would not die out, as it had seemed would be the case when her husband and both sons died.

17. Obed. The name of Ruth’s child means “servant,” that is, of God. This is an abbreviated form of Obadiah, which means “the servant [or worshiper] of Jehovah.”

The father of David. In these words the author comes to the climax of his story, and justifies his narration of it. They point out the fulfillment of the blessing pronounced on Ruth by the townsfolk of Bethlehem (see vs. 11, 12, 15). The name of the kinsman who thought that marriage with the converted Moabitess would endanger his inheritance is forgotten; but from Boaz comes David, the ancestor and type of Christ. Obed was the son of Naomi through the love of Ruth.

Had the Jewish nation appreciated the lesson of the book of Ruth—that God is no respecter of persons—their attitude toward the Gentiles would have been vastly different from what it was. They would have been looking for a Messiah whose mission was to save all men from sin, whether Jew or Gentile, and not merely for a Jewish Messiah to save the Jewish nation from bondage to Rome. There is a lesson for us also in the book of Ruth. If we will but practice love and sympathy toward our fellow men, many of them will say to us as Ruth said to her mother-in-law, “Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God.” And we in turn can reply to them as Boaz did to Ruth, “The Lord

recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust.”

1

¹Nichol, F. D. (1978). *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary : The Holy Bible with exegetical and expository comment*. Commentary Reference Series (Ru 1:1). Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association.