

## INTRODUCTION TO RUTH

The book of Ruth is tucked into the Canon of the Old Testament in a spot where it is like a breath of fresh air in a room which has become heavy with strong odors. The spirit of the book of Judges is one of violence and struggle, and although there are notes of sadness and conflict in the book of Ruth, it is overall a love story. Its message is one of beauty, setting the stage for the account of the tender love of Hannah, the mother of Samuel.

### *NAME*

The Hebrew word for Ruth is pronounced much the same as the English word. It means "comrade, companion, or neighbor." The word is found in Exodus 11:2 in a common setting. The name has come down through the Greek translations of the pre-Christian era, through the Latin translations of the fourth century, A.D., and finds its way into the modern English versions. The book receives its name from the principal character, the Moabitess who became the ancestress of the Christ.

### *PLACE IN THE CANON*

In the later Hebrew arrangement of the Bible, the book of Ruth stands second among the five scrolls called the Megilloth. In the ancient Hebrew Bibles, Judges and Ruth were closely united as is evidenced by the testimony of Josephus, Melito of Sardis, Origen, and Jerome. When the translation of the Bible was made into the Greek, some two hundred years before Christ, Ruth was placed among the historical books. In later times the Jews placed the book among the other writings, called the Hagiographa or Kethubhim.

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### AUTHOR

The fact that it has been closely associated with the book of Judges has lent emphasis to the view that the book was probably written by the same man who wrote Judges. Ancient Jewish and Christian tradition has pointed to Samuel as the author. Some modern commentators, such as Robert Pfeiffer in his *Introduction to the Old Testament* (page 717), declare that this view is no longer tenable. A. S. Geden feels that a post-exilic date (about 400 B.C.) seems to be a preferable time for its being written.

Even some very conservative Christian writers such as Merrill Unger (*Introductory Guide to the Old Testament*, page 384) take the position that the author of the work is unknown. They admit that the Babylonian Talmud ascribes the book to Samuel, but they hold that this is not likely.

The Babylonian Talmud (Baba Bathra, 14 b) says Samuel wrote the book. Matthew Henry in his introductory materials to his comments on the book of Samuel wrote it is probable that Samuel was the penman of it.

Since history knows no other authors, Samuel should be regarded as the writer of the book of Ruth.

### DATE

David was the youngest of the eight sons of Jesse. If we place his birth in the fiftieth year of his father's life, Jesse would have been born in the first year of the Philistine oppression, or forty-eight years after the death of Gideon. It is quite possible that Jesse may also have been a younger son of Obed and born in the fiftieth year of his father's life. If so, the birth of Obed would fall in the last years of Gideon or about 1150 B.C.

## STUDIES IN JOSHUA-JUDGES-RUTH

The last event mentioned in the book is the birth of David. David began to reign at 1010 B.C., but he was a very popular man in Israel before his death. He had been anointed by Samuel (I Samuel 16:1). Early in his career he slew the giant Goliath and became a constant dependent in the court of Saul (I Samuel 17). The fact that he was well known as a soldier and popular in Israel would be reason enough for writing the story of his ancestry.

Samuel died before David became king, and the book must have been written prior to Samuel's death. The death of Samuel is recorded in I Samuel 25:1. A date of 1015 B.C. is probably the best suggestion one can make for the time of writing.

### PURPOSE

The purpose of the book of Ruth is to give a biographical sketch of the righteous ancestors of David, the man destined to be Israel's second king. Through the years the book has given an insight into the history of pious people of the era and encouraged faithful Christian living by their good example. The loving concern of Naomi for her daughters-in-law has inspired many of the mothers of Israel to take good care of their families and to encourage action which will produce the best benefits for all concerned. The devotion of Ruth has been an ideal for married couples through the years, and a song based on her statement of faith is quite often heard in a wedding ceremony. Although Ruth's statement was not made to her husband, her love for a member of his family was the kind of love which must undergird solid, Christian homes.

### PLAN

The book is planned as a straightforward historical narrative. There are no poetic passages, and the work is

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presented in good Hebrew prose. The story flows naturally along and reaches its conclusion in an orderly fashion. It has all the earmarks of historical narrative.

### OUTLINE

The following outline is quite usually given for this short narrative. It contains all the major details of the book and presents them in a fashion which is easy to remember. It should be committed to memory by the Bible student.

- I. Ruth comes to Bethlehem (chapter 1)
  - A. Introduction (vvi 1-7)
  - B. Ruth's determination to remain with Naomi (vv. 8:18)
  - C. The arrival in Bethlehem (vv. 19-22)
- II. Ruth meets Boaz (chapter 2)
  - A. Ruth gleanes in the fields (vv. 1-7)
  - B. The kindness of Boaz (vv. 8-16)
  - C. Ruth returns to Naomi (vv. 17-23)
- III. Ruth appeals to Boaz (chapter 3)
  - A. Naomi's advice (vv. 1-5)
  - B. Ruth speaks to Boaz (vv. 6-13)
  - C. Ruth returns to Naomi (vv. 14-18)
- IV. Ruth marries Boaz (chapter 4)
  - A. The kinsman approached (vv. 1-8)
  - B. Boaz takes Ruth (vv. 9-12)
  - C. Ruth bears a son (vv. 13-17)
  - D. The ancestry of David (vv. 18-22)

### INDEPENDENCE

Although the book of Ruth is very closely associated with the book of Judges, it is not an appendix to that book. It is a small independent work. It resembles the two appendices of the book of Judges only so far as the

#### STUDIES IN JOSHUA-JUDGES-RUTH

incidents recorded in it fall within the period of the Judges. It has a thoroughly distinctive character both in form and content and has nothing in common with the book of Judges to make it inseparable. It differs essentially in substance and design from the book of Judges and its two appendices. As far as history is concerned, the contents of the book pass beyond the time of the Judges. The author plainly shows his intention was not only to give a picture of the family life of pious Israelites in the time of the judges but to give a biographical sketch of the pious ancestors of David, the hero of Israel.

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### OUTLINE OF RUTH

#### I. Ruth Comes to Bethlehem, Chapter One

This section tells how Ruth, the Moabitess, a daughter-in-law of the Bethlehemite Elimelech, of the family of Judah, who had emigrated with his wife and his two sons into the land of Moab on account of a famine, left father and mother, fatherland and kindred, after the death of her husband. Out of childlike affection to her Israelitish mother-in-law, Naomi, whose husband had also died in the land of Moab, Ruth went to Judah, to take refuge under the wings of the God of Israel.

A. Introduction to the life and times of Ruth, 1:1-7

B. Ruth's determination to remain with Naomi, 1:8-18

C. Ruth's arrival in Bethlehem, 1:19-22

#### II. Ruth Meets Boaz, Chapter Two

After Ruth arrived in Bethlehem, she went to glean ears of grain in the field of a wealthy man, Boaz, a near relative of Elimelech.

A. Ruth gleans in the fields, 2:1-7

B. The kindness of Boaz, 2:8-16

C. Ruth returns to Naomi, 2:17-23

#### III. Ruth's Appeal to Boaz, Chapter Three

Under the Mosaic dispensation, a man was obligated to marry his brother's widow, if the widow had no children by her first marriage. In keeping with this law, Boaz was the nearest willing kinsman of the deceased husband of Ruth, Mahlon. Ruth reminded Boaz of this sacred obligation.

A. Naomi's advice to Ruth, 3:1-5

B. Ruth speaks to Boaz, 3:6-13

C. Ruth returns to Naomi, 3:15-18

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### IV. Ruth Marries Boaz, Chapter Four

Boaz did marry Ruth, according to the custom of the Levirate marriage; and they were blessed with a son named Obed. This Obed was the grandfather of David, with whose genealogy the book closes.

A. The near kinsman approached, 4:1-8

B. Boaz marries Ruth, 4:9-12

C. Ruth bears a son, 4:13-17

D. The ancestry of David, 4:18-22