

## Dickson Old Testament Commentary

# RUTH

### WRITER

It is not known who wrote this book. Some have attributed the book to either Samuel, Hezekiah, or Ezra. Since the Holy Spirit has not given us a clear understanding of who wrote the book, we assume that the writer is not important. The fact that it passed Jewish scrutiny of inspired literature in order to be added to the canon of Old Testament Scriptures is enough proof to consider it a part of the Holy Scriptures.

### DATE

The historical background of the book rests in the period of the judges from 1,000 to 1,300 B.C. King David is mentioned by name (4:22). We would assume, therefore, that it was written after his birth and during his kingship. Since King Solomon is not mentioned, we would assume that he had not yet been anointed as king in Israel. Samuel lived in the early reign of David, and thus, if he were the author we would conclude that the book was written sometime during the reign of David.

### BOOK

The historical events of the book cover a period of ten to fifteen years. The name of the book is derived from a young widow named Ruth. Some have assumed that the book served as an appendix to the book of Judges and an introduction to 1 Samuel. However, its true purpose is discovered in 4:18-22 where David is mentioned in the genealogy of Boaz. The significance of this portion of the Messianic genealogy is revealed in Matthew 1:1-14 where it is recorded that through Boaz and Ruth, the Messiah was born into the world (See Lk 3:32).

The book reveals the spiritual stature that was characteristic of many people during the early history of Israel when many political events were transpiring, which events were described in Judges and continued in 1 Samuel. Throughout the cycle of sin and repentance of Israel during these years, the book of Ruth reveals that there were those in Israel who remained faithful to the Lord and thus carried on with their normal lives. After laboring through the national perils of the book of Judges, one finds relief in the love story of Ruth. Not all were evil in Israel.

The book reveals the life of the Gentiles, for Ruth was a Gentile who committed her faith to the God of Israel. Israel's priesthood to the nations of the world is revealed as Ruth is a true convert to the one true and living God. Ruth would be a descendant from Lot's son, Moab (Gn 19:37). She was a Gentile outside the cov-

enant that God had established with Israel at Mt. Sinai. Through her marriage to Boaz, however, she and her descendants were brought into God's covenant with Israel. Though the Moabites were idolaters who worshiped Chemosh, she was converted to the God of Israel through the faithfulness of her mother-in-law, Naomi.

**Outline:** (1) Migration to Moab (1:1-5), (2) The faith of Ruth (1:6-18), (3) Return to Bethlehem (1:19-22), (4) Ruth meets Boaz (2:1-29), (5) Boaz commits to Ruth (3:1-18), (6) Redemption of Elimelech's inheritance (4:1-12), (7) Ancestry of David (4:13-22)

## Chapter 1

### MIGRATION TO MOAB

**1:1-5** *When the judges ruled:* The activities of judges are recorded in the book of Judges. The book of Judges covers a period of about 350 years. We could assume from the statement that is made here that there were more than 14 judges for this great period of time. If there were only 14 judges, then there were possibly times when there were no judges ministering in Israel. Throughout the year of national sin and restoration, people as Naomi, Elimelech and Boaz sought to be true servants of God where they lived. **Famine:** This may have been a famine that was brought on Israel because of one of her periods of digression into sin. **Elimelech:** This name means "God is king." If the name were given by a mother and father who were truly God fearing, then we could assume that the family of Elimelech maintained this genuine faith. The name Mahlon means "sickly," and Chilion means "wasting away." Both names identify the death of

these two sons of Elimelech and Naomi while they were in Moab. **Ephrathites:** These were from Ephrathah which was close to Bethlehem (See 4:11; Gn 35:19; 48:7; 1 Ch 4:4; Mc 5:2). Both Orpah and Ruth were Gentile Moabites.

### THE FAITH OF RUTH

**1:6-14** *That you may find rest:* It was the initial wish of Naomi that both Orpah and Ruth return to their home country in order to marry among their own people and have a home among the Moabites. **Are there still more sons in my womb:** This is a reference to the levirate law of Deuteronomy 25:5,6 (See Gn 38:8-11). If a husband died, it was the responsibility of his brother to take his widow as a wife and raise up a heritage in the name of his dead brother. Naomi, however, reminded the two young girls that she would have no more sons.

**1:15-18** *Your people will be my people:* This was Ruth's commitment to change culturally in order to identify with the people of Naomi (Compare comments 1 Co 9:19-23). **Your God my God:** While in Moab Ruth may have retained some allegiance to Chemosh, the god of the Moabites. However, she was willing to truly convert to the God of Israel. She was willing to relinquish her past in order to remain committed to her mother-in-law, Naomi, and the future.

## RETURN TO BETHLEHEM

**1:19-22** *Is this Naomi:* The return of Naomi caused a stir in the community, which stir indicated that everyone knew that she and her husband had emigrated to the Gentile territory of Moab, but now had returned. *Mara:* This name means “bitter” or “sad.” Instead of complaining to the Lord about her misfortunes in Moab, Naomi believed that it was the Lord’s discipline caused her affliction. She did not despise the discipline of the Lord (See Hb 12:7-11). We are not told if the hard times that Naomi experienced in Moab were God’s discipline to bring her and Ruth back to Palestine where Ruth would become a link in the Messianic lineage of Jesus.

### Chapter 2

#### RUTH MEETS BOAZ

**2:1-7** *Glean grain:* The Israelites were not to harvest the grain in the corners of the fields. This grain was to be left for the poor to harvest for themselves (Dt 24:19-21). *Grain:* This would be any type of grain, but not maize, or corn. *The Moabite young woman:* Even the Gentile foreigners were allowed to glean in the fields. God established laws in Israel in order that everyone could have food. However, everyone had to work for the food they received by doing their own harvesting. There were no continual handouts in this case. Boaz noticed the hard working Gentile woman, Ruth, who was gleaning in his field.

**2:8-13** *My daughter:* By making this statement, Boaz indicated that he was older than Ruth. From their first encoun-

ter, Boaz showed kindness to her in that he commanded that she be able to drink from the same vessels that were brought for his servants. Being amazed by his kindness, Ruth inquired as to why he should be so kind to a foreigner. Boaz explained that he had inquired from others concerning her devotion to her mother-in-law and the commitment she made to the God of Israel. We must also remember that Boaz was a descendant from the marriage of Salmon and Rahab (Mt 1:5; Lk 3:32). He had grown up listening to stories of his Gentile ancestor, Rahab, who had been shown mercy by Israel when they came into the land of Palestine. The faith of Rahab had been passed on to Boaz (Hb 11:31; Js 2:25).

*May you be richly rewarded:* These statements of Boaz in verses 11 & 12 express the priesthood of Israel toward the nations. God established Israel as a nation of priests, and thus the Israelites were to minister their faith in God to the nations. In this historical context, Boaz was assuming his duty to carry out the priestly work of Israel in offering help to a Gentile woman. We must not forget this fact when studying through the books of Judges, 1 & 2 Samuel and 1 & 2 Kings where there was general apostasy in Israel as tribal groups were infected by the sin of the people around them. Instead of Israel assuming her responsibility to preach the God of heaven to the world, they allowed the beliefs of the world to affect them. However, there were many individuals like Boaz who carried on with their priesthood duty to the Gentiles (Compare 1 Pt 2:5,9).

**2:14-16** Boaz was a man of mercy and compassion. Not only did he give his servants special instructions concerning their treatment of Ruth, they were instructed that she be allowed to glean even among the standing grain of the field that was meant for Boaz.

**2:17-23 Kindness:** This is from the Hebrew word *chesed* which means “mercy,” “lovingkindness,” “goodness” or “loyalty.” Boaz went beyond his duty of allowing the poor to simply glean the corners of the fields. He allowed Ruth to glean among the standing grain that was rightfully his. His “kindness” was a manifestation of God’s grace. Through His grace, God allows us to come into His presence, where we as sinners, have no right to come. **Close relative:** Boaz was a kinsman. However, in this case he was not the nearest kinsman who would have the responsibility of redeeming a kinsmen’s land that had been sold (Lv 25:25), or the duty to avenge the death of a kinsmen (Nm 35:19), or to marry the wife of a deceased brother (Dt 25:5-10). However, in this case he was the next in line to carry out such duties if no other kinsman came forward. In reference to Ruth, however, there was a kinsmen in this case who stood before Boaz.

### Chapter 3

#### BOAZ COMMITS TO RUTH

**3:1-5 Find a home for you:** The harvest had now been completed and Naomi, in her concern for the young Ruth, suggested that it was now time for

Ruth to have a home of her own. Ruth agreed, and thus Naomi instructed her in the customs of the land concerning a widow who would present herself to be eligible and ready to marry again.

**3:6-13 You are a near kinsman:** Boaz evidently did not realize that he had the right to take Ruth as his wife, since she had not made it known that she wanted to marry. In this statement, Ruth informed him that she was willing that he alone fulfill the levirate duties toward her. Boaz realized that her intentions were sincere in that he had observed that she did not chase young men or the rich. Boaz was one of common estate, and older than Ruth. By the way she conducted herself, he saw in her a genuine character. **As the Lord lives:** This was Boaz’s oath to Ruth that he would make every effort to take her as his wife. However, there was a kinsman who was closer in lineage to Ruth with whom he had to consult for her hand. The near kinsman had to be given the first opportunity to take Ruth as a wife.

**3:14-18** Boaz asked his servants not to tell others that a woman had come to his door at night, indicating that such had not happened before. Boaz was a man of moral integrity. He did not want Ruth or himself embarrassed. However, he fully understood why she came, for he did not know that he had the opportunity to take her to be a wife. From the advice that he gave her, we would assume that he had considered taking her as a wife, but did not know that she wanted to marry.

## Chapter 4

### REDEMPTION OF ELIMELECH'S INHERITANCE

**4:1-6** *The gate:* Decisions, judgments and administration in Israel took place at the gates of the cities. This is where one went to consult with the elders. *I will redeem it:* Boaz was somewhat crafty in his approach to gain the right to marry Ruth. He first informed the near kinsman that there was a field of land that he had a right to buy. After hearing of the land, the near kinsman agreed to buy the land. But then, Boaz said that there were obligations that came with claiming the land. *I cannot redeem it:* When informed that Ruth came with the land, the near kinsman decided that he would not buy the land, lest he endanger his own inheritance. The land would eventually go to the sons of Ruth, and not to the heirs of the near kinsman. His investment would be lost once the possible sons of Ruth assumed the rights of inheritance. The near kinsman would then have to relinquish his right to both the land and Ruth.

**4:7-12** *This was the custom:* Because the readers of this book had to be informed concerning this custom indicates that the events that transpired here took place many years before the writing of the book. *Took off his shoe:* When the shoe, or sandal, was given to Boaz by the near kinsman in the presence of witnesses, the land transaction was sealed. Boaz not only had a right to redeem the land, but also the right to take Ruth as a wife. *Rachel ... Leah:* Since Boaz and Ruth were the forefathers of David, and

in the lineage of the Messiah, what is stated here certainly came to pass. *Famous in Bethlehem:* In reference to the Messiah, His birthplace in Bethlehem brought fame to this insignificant village of Palestine, as well as to the family of Boaz and Ruth (Mc 5:2). *Tamar ... Judah:* This was the family through which came the existence of the village of Bethlehem (Gn 38:29).

### ANCESTRY OF DAVID

**4:13-22** *Obed:* The birth of Obed was the guarantee that the family of Naomi would continue. *Provider for your old age:* The children took care of the aged parents. *Perez:* Or Perez, was the son of Judah by Tamar (Gn 38:29). David came from the lineage of Perez. This brief genealogy reveals the purpose for the writing of the book. Though the ones who first received the book did not know the reason for this brief genealogy, we today understand because of the mention of David, through whom God promised that the Messiah was to be born into the world (See Mt 1:5,16; Lk 3:23,32). *Salmon:* In the genealogy that is here given we must assume the customary recording of Jewish genealogies wherein only the main personalities of the genealogies were included while some generations were left out. It is stated here that Nahshon begat Salmon, and Salmon, Boaz, covering a period of more than 250 years, the time between the death of Moses and the time of Gideon. This is too great a time for only two generations. In the genealogy of the Messiah, the wife of Salmon was Rahab, the former harlot

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(Mt 1:6; Lk 3:32; Js 2:25). But as the genealogy is here stated, Boaz was not the immediate son of Salmon and Rahab, though they were in the genealogy of Boaz.