

INTRODUCTION TO 8TH BIBLEBOOK

RUTH (before 931 B.C.)

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A. THE ORIGIN OF THE BOOK OF RUTH.

1. The writer and the date of writing.

We do not know who wrote the book of Ruth, nor when it was written. It tells the story of a Moabite women, called Ruth, who married into a Jewish family originating from Bethlehem. Through her faith in the God who had revealed himself in Israel, she too *became a daughter of Abraham*. And through her marriage to Boaz she *became a great grandmother of king David*.

Without any explanation 1 Samuel 22:3-4 writes that *David turned to the king of Moab* for a favour to hide his parents while he was hiding in the cave of Adullam. It is quite possible that the oral tradition of Ruth's history was recorded by a member of her descendants who did not want her to sink into oblivion. Or the writer could have been king Solomon, who also wrote other books.

The book is best placed in a period when the glory of the king of the house of David was not yet tarnished, that is, before the end of Solomon's reign in 931 B.C. when Israel was split into two kingdoms. The book resembles the style of the stories in the books of Samuel and Kings.

The Hebrew Canon consists of three parts:

- The Law (Hebrew: Torah)
- The Prophets (Hebrew: Nebiim)
- The writings (Hebrew: Ketubim)

Ruth was arranged under the Writings which also consisted of three parts:

- *Poetry and wisdom*: Psalms, Proverbs, Job
- *Rolls (Megilot) or festive scrolls*: Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther
- *Historical books*: Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah, 1 and 2 Chronicles

The reason why Ruth was separated from Judges and Lamentations from Jeremiah was because they were later used in the Jewish liturgical year as follows:

- The book Song of Songs is read during 1st month (Passover)
- The book Ruth is read during 3rd month (Pentecost)
- The book Lamentations is read during 5th month
- The book Ecclesiastes is read during 7th month (Feast of Tabernacles)
- The book Esther is read during 12th month (Purim)

The reason Daniel was assigned to the Writings was because he was not regarded as a prophet, but as *a civil servant*. Although he possessed a prophetic gift he was not anointed to be a prophet. Ezra was not a prophet, but *a scribe*. Nehemiah was not a prophet, but *a governor*.

Modern Bibles follow the order of the books in the Greek translation of the Old Testament: the Septuagint.

2. The purpose of the book of Ruth.

The purpose is to relate history, especially the history of the ancestors of king David. It tells from which honourable ancestors he descended.

The book has an even higher purpose: to relate the ancestry of the coming Messiah-King, Jesus Christ. *The ancestors of Jesus Christ as to his human nature were not exclusively Jews, but also non-Jews:*

- Tamar, the Canaanite daughter-in-law of Judah who tempted him as a prostitute¹
- Rahab, the Canaanite prostitute and mother of Boaz
- Ruth, the Moabite great grandmother of king David². This shows that God planned to include the heathen in his salvation plan.

The book is not a defence of the practice of the kinsman-redeemer³, but favours a culturally orderly procedure in getting married. The book also gives an example in which a woman may take the initiative to ask someone to marry her. The book of Ruth speaks of God's wisdom, grace and faithfulness.

¹ Genesis 38

² Ruth 4:17-22; Matthew 1:3,5

³ Deuteronomy 25:5-10; Leviticus 25:25-28

2. THE DIVISION AND MAIN CONTENTS OF THE BOOK OF RUTH.

The theme of the book of Ruth: *God causes a non-Jew to be a link in his history of salvation.*

1. Ruth chapter 1. Making a commitment to the LORD.

- Ruth 1:1-5. The history of Elimelech and Naomi from Bethlehem (Ephrath)⁴ in Judah. Due to famine the family went to live in Moab. Their sons Mahlon and Kilion married Moabite women, Orpah and Ruth.
- Ruth 1:6-18. After the three men died, Naomi and her two daughters-in-law set out to return to Bethlehem. At Naomi's request, Orpah returned to Moab, but Ruth clung to Naomi and confessed her faith in the LORD. "Don't urge me to leave you or turn back from you. Where you will go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God" (1:16).
- Ruth 1:19-22. Ruth was determined to return with Naomi to Israel.

2. Ruth chapter 2. Getting acquainted with the kinsman-redeemer.

- Ruth 2:1-18. Ruth meets Boaz. *With respect to marriage, note the elements of getting acquainted with one another first: taking the guidance of God serious, being a genuine believer, making informal inquiries, observing the other's steady work, being approachable, accepting invitation, knowing the other's reputation, knowing the other's goals, knowing the other's commitment to the Lord, observing the other's kindness, sharing time and activities with one another, knowing the other's sharing and support, knowing the other's protection.*
- Ruth 2:19-23. The advice of Naomi: stay close to the kinsman-redeemer. Note that Ruth accepts good advice from an older believer.

3. Ruth chapter 3. Ruth's step of faith.

- Ruth 3:1-15. Ruth follows Naomi's advice. *With respect to marriage, note the importance of being attractive, taking the initiative to meet, the importance of a noble character, making promises that you can keep, persistent care for the one you love.*
- Ruth 3:16-18. Ruth waits patiently for Boaz to act and settle the matter.

4. Ruth chapter 4. Boaz's step of faith.

With respect to marriage, note the legal, social and spiritual aspects.

- Ruth 4:1-8. The legal procedure. Boaz redeems the land of Elimelech and Ruth in the presence of the elders.
- Ruth 4:9-10. The social announcement. The presence of witnesses.
- Ruth 4:11-12. The spiritual blessing. The elders pronounce a blessing from the LORD on the marriage. "May the LORD make the woman coming into your home like Rachel and Leah who together built up the house of Israel. May you have standing in Ephrathah and be famous in Bethlehem" (4:11). Boaz was a name of standing in Bethlehem. David was a name great in Israel. Jesus Christ is a name above every other name⁵.
- Ruth 4:13-17. Marriage and the child. Note: the consummation took place only after marriage; the LORD enabled Ruth to conceive; and Ruth's relationship to her mother-in-law. "Your daughter-in-law loves you and is better to you than seven sons" (4:15)
- Ruth 4:18-22. Ruth is a link in the chain of God's history of salvation: Boaz, Obed, Jesse, David. 'Obed' means 'servant' (like Ruth served Naomi). He is a type of Jesus Christ, who is the Redeemer-Servant. Jesus said, "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many⁶."

⁴ Genesis 35:16

⁵ Acts 4:1; Philippians 2:9-11

⁶ Mark 10:45