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BRIEF STUDIES

"HE" OR "SHE" IN RUTH 3:15b?

In the history of the English Bible, Ruth 3:15 stands out as an interesting passage involving a curious error.

Baikie (*English Bible*, ch.22) draws our attention to the fact that the first edition of the King James Version is often known as the Great He Bible, while the second is called the Great She Bible. The reason for these curious nicknames is that in the passage Ruth 3:15, the first edition reads, quite correctly, "and he went into the citie," while the second, and nearly all subsequent editions read, "and she went into the citie." You will find that your own Bibles in this respect are "she" Bibles; but the true reading has been restored in the Revised Version, though a footnote is added stating that some ancient authorities read "she" (Vulg. and Syr.). In his *Biblia Hebraica* Kittel notes in the critical apparatus that there are 54 manuscripts which belong to the "she" class. But in view of the huge number of "he" texts these few variant readings have little weight, especially since the "she" reading is the easy one and could readily owe its origin to a scribal error.

However, David Daiches in *The King James Version of the Bible, an Account of the Development and Sources of the English Bible of 1611 with Special Reference to the Hebrew Tradition*, University of Chicago Press 1941, states: "There are various bibliographical problems connected with the first issue of the Authorized Version. Two separate issues, each bearing the date 1611, differ from each other in many small details. Of these differences the best known are the two readings in Ruth 3:15, where one issue reads, 'he went into the city,' the other reading *correctly*, 'she went into the city.'" (P. 74. Italics our own.) In response to our inquiry Mr. Daiches, who is at present living in his native England, replied: "The 'he' 'she' business in Ruth 3:15 is interesting and a bit confusing. You are quite right in saying that the Hebrew text as we have it reads, 'and he went into the city.' Yet the sense seems to require 'she.' After all, it is Ruth and not Boaz who (apparently) went into the city. For note how verse 16—the immediately following verse—begins: 'And when she came to her mother-in-law. . . .' And the Hebrew there is וַתָּבוֹא, although, as you point out, it is וַתָּבֵא in verse 15.—There is no doubt that 'he' is right as a rendering of the Hebrew text, and if I were writing my

book today, I would go into the matter at greater length and explain the position more clearly. But, though 'he' does translate the Hebrew text, it remains puzzling. The Midrash, puzzled by the 'he,' seeks to solve the problem by explaining that Boaz accompanied Ruth to the city gate, lest she be molested. If that is meant, it is certainly an odd way of putting it."

We prefer not only to let the Hebrew text stand, but also to translate it exactly as it reads: "and he went into the city." There is no real difficulty involved. It is simply a plain statement of fact, telling us where Boaz went. Verse 16 tells us where Ruth went. If this story were recast into the form of a drama, the stage directions at this point might read: "Exit Boaz, to the city," and "Exit Ruth, to her mother-in-law."

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