

**From the Depths of Exclusion to the Heights of Embrace**

**The Book of Ruth – A Lesson in Paradigm Shift**

Rabbi Hanan Schlesinger (New moon of Sivan, 5780 [2020])

**1** **Introduction and** **General Trajectory**

**Ruth chapter 1**

1 In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land; and a man of Bethlehem in Judah, with his wife and two sons, went to reside in the country of Moab. 2 The man’s name was Elimelech, his wife’s name was Naomi, and his two sons were named Mahlon and Chilion—Ephrathites of Bethlehem in Judah. They came to the country of Moab and remained there. 3 Elimelech, Naomi’s husband, died; and she was left with her two sons.4 They married Moabite women, one named Orpah and the other Ruth, and they lived there about ten years.5 Then those two—Mahlon and Chilion—also died; so the woman was left without her two sons and without her husband. 6 She started out with her daughters-in-law to return from the country of Moab; for in the country of Moab she had heard that the LORD had taken note of His people and given them food.  7 Accompanied by her two daughters-in-law, she left the place where she had been living; and they set out on the road back to the land of Judah. … 14 They broke into weeping again, and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law farewell. But Ruth clung to her. … 19 and the two went on until they reached Bethlehem.

**Ruth chapter 4**

11 All the people at the gate and the elders answered, “We are [witnesses]. May the LORD make the woman who is coming into your house like Rachel and Leah, both of whom built up the House of Israel! Prosper in Ephrathah and perpetuate your name in Bethlehem! … 13 So Boaz married Ruth; she became his wife, and he cohabited with her. The LORD let her conceive, and she bore a son.

2 **The Radical Beginning and End Points of the Trajectory**

**Book of Numbers chapter 25**

1 While Israel was staying at Shittim, the people profaned themselves by whoring with the Moabite women, 2 who invited the people to the sacrifices for their god. The people partook of them and worshiped that god. 3 Thus Israel attached itself to Baal-peor, and the LORD was incensed with Israel…. 9 Those who died of the plague numbered twenty-four thousand.

**Book of Deuteronomy chapter 23**

4 No Ammonite or Moabite shall come into the congregation of the LORD; none of their descendants, even in the tenth generation, shall never come into the congregation of the LORD, 5 because they did not meet you with food and water on your journey after you left Egypt, and because they hired Balaam son of Beor, from Pethor of Aram-naharaim, to curse you.— 6 But the LORD your God refused to heed Balaam; instead, the LORD your God turned the curse into a blessing for you, for the LORD your God loves you.— 7 You shall never concern yourself with their welfare or benefit as long as you live.

**Sefer Olam Raba chapter 12**

The time of Eglon King of Moav is when the events of the Book of Ruth takes place.

**Midrash Ruth Raba, chapter 1 section 1**

"In the days when the judges judged ([Ruth 1:1](file://localhost/Ruth.1.1))" … Who were those judges? Rav said: "They were Barak and Deborah". Rabbi Yehoshua Ben Levi said: "They were Shamgar and Ehud".

**Book of Judges chapter 3**

12 The Israelites again did what was offensive to the LORD. And because they did what was offensive to the LORD, the LORD let King Eglon of Moab prevail over Israel13 [Eglon] brought the Ammonites and the Amalekites together under his command, and went and defeated Israel and occupied the City of Palms. 14 The Israelites were subject to King Eglon of Moab for eighteen years. 15 Then the Israelites cried out to the LORD, and the LORD raised up a champion for them: the Benjaminite Ehud son of Gera, a left-handed man. It happened that the Israelites sent tribute to King Eglon of Moab through him. 16 So Ehud made for himself a two-edged dagger, a gomed in length, which he girded on his right side under his cloak. … 21 Reaching with his left hand, Ehud drew the dagger from his right side and drove it into [Eglon’s] belly. 26 But Ehud had made good his escape while they delayed; he had passed Pesilim and escaped to Seirah. 27 When he got there, he had the ram’s horn sounded through the hill country of Ephraim, and all the Israelites descended with him from the hill country; and he took the lead. 28 “Follow me closely,” he said, “for the LORD has delivered your enemies, the Moabites, into your hands.” They followed him down and seized the fords of the Jordan against the Moabites; they let no one cross. 29 On that occasion they slew about 10,000 Moabites; they were all robust and brave men, yet not one of them escaped.30 On that day, Moab submitted to Israel; and the land was tranquil for eighty years.

**Ruth chapter 4**

17 and the women neighbors gave him a name, saying, “A son is born to Naomi!” They named him Obed; he was the father of Jesse, father of David. 18 This is the line of Perez: Perez begot Hezron, 19 Hezron begot Ram, Ram begot Ammi-nadab, 20 Amminadab begot Nahshon, Nahshon begot Salmon, 21 Salmon begot Boaz, Boaz begot Obed, 22 Obed begot Jesse, and Jesse begot David.

**Isaiah chapter 11**

1 But a shoot shall grow out of the stump of Jesse, A twig shall sprout from his stock. 2 The spirit of the LORD shall alight upon him: A spirit of wisdom and insight, A spirit of counsel and valor, A spirit of devotion and reverence for the LORD.3 He shall sense the truth by his reverence for the LORD: He shall not judge by what his eyes behold, Nor decide by what his ears perceive. 4 Thus he shall judge the poor with equity And decide with justice for the lowly of the land. He shall strike down a land with the rod of his mouth And slay the wicked with the breath of his lips. 5 Justice shall be the girdle of his loins, And faithfulness the girdle of his waist. 6 The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, The leopard lie down with the kid;  The calf, the beast of prey, and the fatling together, With a little boy to herd them.  7 The cow and the bear shall graze, Their young shall lie down together; And the lion, like the ox, shall eat straw. 8 A babe shall play Over a viper’s hole, And an infant pass his hand Over an adder’s den.  9 In all of My sacred mount Nothing evil or vile shall be done; For the land shall be filled with devotion to the LORD As water covers the sea.  10 In that day, The stock of Jesse that has remained standing shall become a standard to peoples— Nations shall seek his counsel And his abode shall be honored. 11 In that day, my Lord will apply His hand again to redeeming the other part of His people from Assyria—as also from Egypt, Pathros, Nubia, Elam, Shinar, Hamath, and the coastlands.  12 He will hold up a signal to the nations And assemble the banished of Israel, And gather the dispersed of Judah From the four corners of the earth.

**3 Negative Attitudes Towards Moabites and Towards Interaction with Them**

**Midrash Ruth Raba chapter 2, section 6**

"They came to the country of Moab and remained there. ([Ruth 1:2](file://localhost/Ruth.1.2))": at first they came to them in the cities and they found them out of control with abominations, and then they came to them in the country and found them deficient in water, and then they went back to them in the cities "They came to the country of Moab and remained there".

**Midrash Ruth Raba chapter 1, section 4**

Elimelech was one the great leaders of his district and one of the financial supporters of his generation. But when the years of famine came, he said, “Now all Israel will come knocking at my door, each one with his basket.” He got up and fled from them. This is the meaning of the verse, “and a man went [out] from Bethlehem in Judah.

**Midrash Yalkut Shimoni Ruth section 600**

“And they took for themselves Moabite women” – What caused them to take Moabite women? – It was because they behaved like Amon and Moav in their stinginess: “they did not meet you with food and water”.

**Midrash Ruth Raba chapter 2, section 9**

"They married Moabite women ([Ruth 1:4](file://localhost/Ruth.1.4))": The tannaim taught in the name of Rabbi Meir that they did not convert them nor did they immerse them and the new halakhah has not been made and they were punished on account of them: [the halakhah being] Ammonite and not Ammonitess; Moabite and not Moabitess.

**Ruth chapter 1**

13 Should you wait for them to grow up? Should you on their account debar yourselves from marriage? Oh no, my daughters! My lot is far more bitter than yours, for the hand of the LORD has struck out against me.” [alternative translation – “I am embittered because of you”]

**Ruth chapter 1**

19 And the two went on until they reached Bethlehem. When they arrived in Bethlehem, the whole city buzzed with excitement over them. The women said, “Can this be Naomi?” 20 “Do not call me Naomi,” she replied. “Call me Mara [Bitter], for the Almighty has made my lot very bitter. 21 I went away full, and the LORD has brought me back empty.

**Ruth chapter 2**

9 Keep your eyes on the field they are reaping, and follow them. I have ordered the men not to molest you.

**Ruth chapter 2**

22 And Naomi answered her daughter-in-law Ruth, “It is best, daughter, that you go out with his girls, such that you will not be molested in some other field.”

**Ruth chapter 2**

10 She prostrated herself with her face to the ground, and said to him, “Why are you so kind as to single me out, when I am a foreigner?”

**Ruth chapter 4**

6 The redeemer replied, “Then I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I destroy my own inheritance. You take over my right of redemption, for I am unable to exercise it.”

**Midrash Ruth Raba chapter 8, section 1**

Rabbi Abba son of Kahana began: "So tremble, and sin no more; ponder it on your bed, and sigh ([Psalms 4:5](file://localhost/Psalms.4.5))": "tremble and sin no more", David said before the Holy One, blessed be He, until when are they going to cause me to tremble and say 'isn’t his family illegitimate and isn’t he from Ruth the Moabitess?'"

**4 Ruth Confounds Stereotypes Through her Loving-kindness Towards her Mother-in-Law**

**Ruth chapter 1**

16 But Ruth replied, “Do not urge me to leave you, to turn back and not follow you. For wherever you go, I will go; wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God. 17 Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. Thus and more may the LORD do to me if anything but death parts me from you.” 18 When [Naomi] saw how determined she was to go with her, she ceased to argue with her.

**Ruth chapter 2**

2 Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, “I would like to go to the fields and glean among the ears of grain, behind someone who may show me kindness.” “Yes, daughter, go,” she replied. 3 and off she went. She came and gleaned in a field.

**Ruth chapter 2**

23 So she stayed close to the maidservants of Boaz, and gleaned until the barley harvest and the wheat harvest were finished. And she dwelt with her mother-in-law.

5 **Boaz Overcomes Stereotypes and Prejudice and Shows Loving-kindness Towards Ruth the Moabite**

[Recall above Yalkut Shimoni in part 3]

**Ruth chapter 2**

4 Presently Boaz arrived from Bethlehem. He greeted the reapers, “The LORD be with you!” And they responded, “The LORD bless you!” 5 Boaz said to the servant who was in charge of the reapers, “Whose girl is that?” 6 The servant in charge of the reapers replied, “She is a Moabite girl who came back with Naomi from the country of Moab. 7 She said, ‘Please let me glean and gather among the sheaves behind the reapers.’ She has been on her feet ever since she came this morning. She has rested but little in the hut.” 8 Boaz said to Ruth, “Listen to me, daughter. Don’t go to glean in another field. Don’t go elsewhere, but stay here close to my girls. 9 Keep your eyes on the field they are reaping, and follow them. I have ordered the men not to molest you. And when you are thirsty, go to the jars and drink some of [the water] that the men have drawn.” 10 She prostrated herself with her face to the ground, and said to him, “Why are you so kind as to single me out, when I am a foreigner?” 11 Boaz said in reply, “I have been told of all that you did for your mother-in-law after the death of your husband, how you left your father and mother and the land of your birth and came to a people you had not known before. 12 May the LORD reward your deeds. May you have a full recompense from the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have sought refuge!” 13 She answered, “You are most kind, my lord, to comfort me and to speak gently to your maidservant—though I am not so much as one of your maidservants.” 14 At mealtime, Boaz said to her, “Come over here and partake of the meal, and dip your morsel in the vinegar.” So she sat down beside the reapers. He handed her roasted grain, and she ate her fill and had some left over. 15 When she got up again to glean, Boaz gave orders to his workers, “You are not only to let her glean among the sheaves, without interference, 16 but you must also pull some [stalks] out of the heaps and leave them for her to glean, and not scold her.”

**Ruth chapter 2**

21 Ruth the Moabite said, “He even told me, ‘Stay close by my workers until all my harvest is finished.’”

**Ruth chapter 3**

15 And he said, “Hold out the shawl you are wearing.” She held it while he measured out six measures of barley, and he put it on her back. When she got back to the town.

**Ruth chapter 3**

11 And now, daughter, have no fear. I will do on your behalf whatever you ask, for all the elders of my town know what a fine woman you are.

**Leviticus, chapter 19**

33. When a sojourner sojourns with you in your land, you shall not oppress him. 34. The sojourner who sojourns with you shall be as a native from among you, and you shall love him as yourself; for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt. I am the Lord, your God.

6 **The Archimedean Point**

**Midrash Ruth Raba chapter 2, section 14**

Rabbi Zeira says: "This book [of Ruth] does not have anything in it concerned with impurity or purity nor what is forbidden and what is permitted. So why is it written? To teach us the greatness of the reward for acts of loving-kindness."

**Midrash Ruth Raba chapter 5, section 6**

"And Boaz said unto her at meal-time: 'Come here, and eat of the bread, and dip your morsel in the vinegar.' And she sat beside the reapers; and they reached her parched corn, and she did eat and was satisfied, and left thereof ([Ruth 2:14](file://localhost/Ruth.2.14))". Rabbi Yonatan began: "For this verse there are six interpretations: One is David. "Come here (*halom*)": that is draw near to kingship", and not "here" but rather "kingship", just as it is written: "that you have brought me thus far (*halom*)? ([2 Samuel 7:18](file://localhost/II_Samuel.7.18))". "And eat from the bread": that is the bread of kingship. …

Rabbi Yitzchak the son of Maryon said: "the scripture came to teach us that if a man is going to do a mitzvah, let it be done with his whole heart. Now if Reuben had known that the Holy One, blessed be He would write about him "And Reuben heard it, and delivered him out of their hand ([Genesis 37:21](file://localhost/Genesis.37.21))" on his shoulder he would have brought him to his father. And if Aaron had known that the Holy One, blessed be He would write about him "And also, behold, he comes forth to meet you ([Exodus 4:14](file://localhost/Exodus.4.14))" with tambourines and dances he would have met him. And if Boaz had known that the Holy One, blessed be He would write about him "And they reached her parched corn, and she did eat and was satisfied, and left thereof" he would have fed her with fattened calves".

Rabbi Kohen and Rabbi Joshua of Sikhnin in the name of Rabbi Levi: "Previously when a man performed a mitzvah, prophets wrote about it. But now, when a man performs a mitzvah who writes about it? Elijah writes it and the Messiah and the Holy One, blessed be He, seal it with their hands. See! It is written: "Then they that feared Hashem spoke one with another; and Hashem hearkened, and heard, and a book of remembrance was written before Him, for them that feared Hashem, and that thought upon His name ([Malachi 3:16](file://localhost/Malachi.3.16))"".

**Midrash Ruth Raba chapter 7, section 7**

"Meanwhile, Boaz had gone to the gate and sat down there. And now the redeemer whom Boaz had mentioned passed by. He called, “Come over and sit down here, So-and-so!” And he came over and sat down ([Ruth 4:1](file://localhost/Ruth.4.1))": … Rabbi Samuel the son of Nachman said that he was ignorant of the words of the Torah. He said: "the first ones did not die except because they married her and I am going to go and marry her? I certainly am not going to marry her. I will not pollute my seed and I am not going to create unfitness for my children". And he did not know that the halakhah had been changed "Ammonite and not Ammonitess; Moabite and not Moabitess".

**Mishna, Tractate Yevamot, chapter 8, mishna 3**

An Ammonite and a Moabite are forbidden [to come into the congregation of the Lord] and their prohibition is forever. However, their women are permitted at once.

**Babylonian Talmud Yevamot page 76b**

As the verse states: “An Ammonite or a Moabite shall not come into the congregation of the Lord” ([Deuteronomy 23:4](file://localhost/Deuteronomy.23.4)), teaching that **an Ammonite** man is barred from coming into the congregation, **but not an Ammonite woman;** and similarly, **a Moabite** man is barred from coming into the congregation, **but not a Moabite woman.**

[Recall Ruth Raba, chapter 2, section 9 in part 3 above]

**Babylonian Talmud Tractate Ketubot page 7b**

“And he took ten men of the Elders of the city and said: Sit you here, and they sat” ([Ruth 4:2](file://localhost/Ruth.4.2)). … And what does Rabbi Abbahu derive from this verse …  he derives that the Torah prohibition with regard to marrying members of the nations of Ammon and Moab is limited to a male Ammonite and not a female Ammonite, and to a male Moabite and not a female Moabite, … If it would enter your mind that he gathered the men in order to derive a *halakha*, would it not have been sufficient if they were not ten? The Gemara answers: Yes, in fact a quorum of ten is not necessary to issue a halakhic ruling. Nevertheless, Boaz convened ten Elders to publicize the matter, as Shmuel said to Rav Ḥana of Baghdad: Go and bring me an assembly of ten men and I will say to you before them a *halakha* that I seek to disseminate …

**Midrash Ruth Raba chapter 6, section 1**

"At midnight ([Ruth 3:8](file://localhost/Ruth.3.8))": "I arise at midnight to praise You for the judgments of Your righteousness ([Psalm 119:62](file://localhost/Psalms.119.62))." Rabbi Pinchas in the name of Rabbi Eliezer son of Jacob: "the harp and the lyre were set above the head of David and when he was awakened in the middle of the night, he stood and played on them". Rabbi Levi said: the harp was hung "for the judgments of Your righteousness"… the "judgments are those which you brought on the Ammonites and Moabites, and the "righteousness" what you did with my [David's] grandfather and grandmother, because if he had afflicted her with a curse even once, from where would I have come?, rather you placed in his heart to bless her, as it is said: "Blessed are you to Hashem, my daughter ([Ruth 3:10](file://localhost/Ruth.3.10))": "A man’s fears become a trap for him, But he who trusts in Hashem shall be safeguarded ([Proverbs 29:25](file://localhost/Proverbs.29.25))". … This fear, that is what Ruth caused Boaz, as it is said "the man was frightened, and turned himself ([Ruth 3:8](file://localhost/Ruth.3.8))". And he justly could have cursed her, but rather "But he who trusts in Hashem shall be safeguarded" and you placed it in his heart to bless her, as it is said "Blessed are you to Hashem, my daughter ([Ruth 3:10](file://localhost/Ruth.3.10))".

**Midrash Rut Raba chapter 8, section 1**

Rabbi Yitzchak began: "Then (*'az*) I said, “Behold I have come ([Psalm 40:8](file://localhost/Psalms.40.8))": This means that it is fitting for me to burst out in songs of praise for my coming', as we find that "then" (*'az*) is indicative of song, as it is said: "Then (*'az*) Moses and the Israelites sang this song ([Exodus 15:1](file://localhost/Exodus.15.1))": At the outset I was included in “no Moabite shall come into the congregation” but I did come, "with a scroll of a book (*megillat sefer*) written about me ([Psalm 40:8](file://localhost/Psalms.40.8))". [At the outset I was excluded] "With a scroll": (*megillah*)"Whom you have commanded that they not come into the congregation ([Lamentations 1:1](file://localhost/Lamentations.1.1)0)". "Of a book (*sefer*): "No Ammonite or Moabite shall come into the congregation ([Deuteronomy 23:4](file://localhost/Deuteronomy.23.4))". But [afterwards] not only did I come, but I came by way of a scroll and a book written about me. "In a scroll": Perez, Hezron, Ram, Aminadab, Nahson, Boaz, Obed, Jesse, David. "In a book": "And Hashem said, “Rise and anoint him, for this is the one ([1 Samuel 16:12](file://localhost/I_Samuel.16.12))".

Rabbi Huna says: "It is written: "God has provided me with another seed ([Genesis 4:25](file://localhost/Genesis.4.25))": the seed will come from another place, and who is this? This is the King Messiah".

**Commentary on Ruth Raba of Yafe Anaf**

“God has provided me with another seed in place of Abel for Cain had killed him” – the implication is that David will remedy the malady initiated by Cain: “The wolf will lie down with the lamb” and peace will reign in the land.

**7 Epilogue**

**Ruth Raba chapter 2, section 2**

Rabbi Samuel the son of Nachmani interpreted these verses from Chronicles as referring to David… "They dwelt/sat there in the king’s service": Based on what did they say the Ruth the Moabitess did not die until she saw Solomon the son of her son sitting and judging the case of the harlots. See! It is written: "And he had a throne placed for the queen mother": this is Bathsheba, "and she sat on his right (1 Kings 2:19)", this is Ruth the Moabitess.

Note-part of the power of this presentation comes from Ketubot 7b that claims that Boaz innovated the law of Moabite and not Moabitess in chapter 4 of the Book of Ruth, but it must be conceded that other sources dispute this. See Pesikta D’Rav Kahana beginning of chapter 16 which has Boaz saying when he first meets Ruth: “Had you come to us earlier we would not have accepted you (to glean in our fields) because the halacha of Moabite and not Moabitess had not yet been innovated.” Also, Aramaic Translation of Ruth, chapter 2, verses 10-11.

I wrote up this shiur in an article called The Scroll of Boaz. There are used some additional sources:  
Tractate Shabat 113b – “She went to and fro, to and fro, until she found until she found people that it was comfortable for her to be with them”

Midrash Lekach Tov Ruth 2:9 – He commanded his reapers to observe the commandment of loving the stranger

Midrash Lekach Tov 2:1; Midrash Ruth Raba 4:3 – Boaz was a Torah scholar

Parallels and precedent for the direction of the approach put forth in part 6 can be found in Rashi on Deuteronomy 2:26; Midrash [Devarim Rabba 5:13](https://www.sefaria.org/Devarim_Rabbah.5.13?lang=he-en" \t "_blank); Midrash Tanchuma Tzav 3; Bamidbar Raba 19; Rabaynu Chayim of Volozhin, Responsa Chut ha-Meshulash, I, no. 8; Rabbi Barukh Epstein, Torah Temima, Exodus 21:24, no. 171, and throughout the writings of Rav Mordechai Leiner in his Mei haShiloach