

# THE WEXNER FOUNDATION

## THE BOOK OF RUTH

Chapter Four: Birth and Re-Birth  
Dr. Erica Brown | June 1, 2022

**Woodcuts of Ruth by Margaret Adams Parker from *Who Are you, My Daughter? Reading Ruth Through Image and Text*, trans. Ellen Davis (JPS, 2003).**



### Ruth 1:19-21

19. 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, for Shaddai has made my lot very bitter.

21. I went away full, and the Lord has brought me back empty. How can you call me Naomi, when the Lord has dealt harshly with me, when Shaddai has brought misfortune upon me!"

### Ruth 4: 9-17

9.

וַיֹּאמֶר בַּעַז לְזָקְנִים וּכְלֵדָה עַם עֲזִים אֲתָּם כִּי קָנִיתִי אֶת־כָּל־אָשָׁר לְאַלְמָלֵךְ וְאֶת כָּל־אָשָׁר לְכָלִילָן וּמְחַלֵּן מִזֶּד גָּמָם:

And Boaz said to the elders and to the rest of the people, "You are witnesses today that I am acquiring from Naomi all that belonged to Elimelech and all that belonged to Chilion and Mahlon.

10.

וְגַם אֶת־דָּרוֹת הַמָּאכִיבָּה אֲשֶׁת מְחַלֵּן קָנִיתִי לֵי לְאַשָּׁה לְהַקִּים שְׁמַ-הַמֶּת עַל־גְּנַחַלְתוֹ וְלֹא־יִכְרֹת שְׁמַ-הַמֶּת מִעַם אָחִיו וּמִשְׁעָר אָקוֹמָן עֲזִים אֲתָּם כִּיּוֹם:

I am also acquiring Ruth the Moabite, the wife of Mahlon, as my wife, so as to perpetuate the name of the deceased upon his estate, that the name of the deceased may not disappear from among his kinsmen and from the gate of his home town. You are witnesses today."

11.

וַיֹּאמֶר כָּל־הָעָם אֲשֶׁר־בַּשְׁעָר וּבְזָקְנִים עֲזִים יְמֻן יְהוָה אֶת־הָאָשָׁה כִּבְאָה אֶל־בַּיִת כְּרָחֵל וּכְלָא אָשָׁר בְּנָוּ שְׁמֵיכֶם אֶת־בַּיִת יִשְׂרָאֵל וְעַשְׂהָה־תְּמִילָה וּקְרָא־שֵׁם בַּבַּיִת לָהֶם:

All the people at the gate and the elders answered, "We are. 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!"

12.

וַיֹּהַי בִּימֵךְ בְּבַיִת פְּרִזֵּז אֲשֶׁר־יָלַגְתָּה תָּמֵר לִיהְוָה מִזְבְּחָה מִזְבְּחָה אֲשֶׁר יְמֻן יְהוָה לְכָל־מִזְרָחָה כִּזְאת:

And may your house be like the house of Perez whom Tamar bore to Judah—through the offspring which the Lord will give you by this young woman."

13.

וַיָּלַח בַּעַז אֶת־דָּרוֹת נָתָת־לָוּ לְאַשָּׁה נִבְא אַלְיָה נִמְאָן יְהוָה לְהַקְרֹזָן וְתָלֵד בָּן:

So Boaz married Ruth; she became his wife, and he cohabited with her. The Lord let her conceive, and she bore a son.

14.

וַתֹּאמֶר נָהָרָה כָּנָשִׁים אֶל־נְעָמָן בָּרוּךְ יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר לֵא הַשְׁבִּית לְךָ גָּאֵל כִּיּוֹם וַיָּקָרָא שָׁמוֹ בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל:

And the women said to Naomi, "Blessed be the Lord, who has not withheld a redeemer from you today! May his name be perpetuated in Israel!"

15.

וְהִנֵּה לְךָ לְמִשְׁיבָּה נֶפֶשׁ וְלְכָלְכָל אֶת־שִׁיכְתָּךְ כִּי כָלָתֶךָ אֲשֶׁר־אֶבְנָתֶךָ יְלַלְתָּהוּ אֲשֶׁר־הִיא טֹבָה לְךָ מִשְׁבַּעַת בְּנָים:

He will renew your life and sustain your old age; for he is born of your daughter-in-law, who loves you and is better to you than seven sons."

16.

וַתָּלַח נְעָמָן אֶת־הַלֵּל נָתַת־תְּמִילָה בְּמִיקָּה נָתָת־לָוּ לְאַמְנוֹת:

Naomi took the child and held it to her bosom. She became its foster mother,  
17.

וַתִּקְרֹא אָנָה לוּ הַשְׁכְּנוֹת שֶׁם לֹא מֵרַיְלָה בְּנָה לְעַמִּי וַתִּקְרֹא אָנָה שֶׁמוֹ עֹבֵד הוּא אֲבִירִישׁ אֲבִי דָוָד:

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.

**Leon Kass and Hannah Mandelbaum, *Reading Ruth* (Paul Dry, 2021): 94.**

The women have clearly changed their tune. When Naomi and Ruth returned “empty” from Moab, bereaved and childless, the women gossiped. When Ruth cleaved to Naomi, both of them living on gleanings and forming a world unto themselves, the women were nowhere to be seen. But now, with Ruth’s fruitful marriage and Naomi’s grandmotherhood – in which they see the hand of God – the women rush forth to celebrate and speak with one voice: their solidarity *as women* is built not on female friendship but on their shared calling of motherhood. One might fault them for their earlier lack of sympathy, but not at all for their current sentiments. The women know in their bones the blessings of which they now speak.