

# 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 בְּעֵז לְזִקְנִים וְכָל־הָעָם עֲדִים אַתֶּם הַיּוֹם כִּי קָנִיתִי אֶת־כָּל־אֲשֶׁר לְאֵלֵימֶלֶךְ וְאֵת כָּל־אֲשֶׁר לְכִלְיוֹן וּמַחֲלוֹן מִיַּד נָעֲמִי:

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־נְרוֹת הַמֹּאבִּיָּה אֲשֶׁת מַחֲלוֹן קָנִיתִי לִי לְאִשָּׁה לְהַקִּים שְׁמֵהֶם עַל־גִּתְלָתוֹ וְלֹא־יִכָּרֵת שְׁמֵהֶם מֵעַם אֲחִיו וּמִשְׁעַר מְקוֹמוֹ עֲדִים אַתֶּם הַיּוֹם:

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.

וַיֹּאמְרוּ כָּל־הָעָם אֲשֶׁר־בְּשַׁעַר וְהַזְקֵנִים עֲדִים יִתֵּן יְהוָה אֶת־הַאִשָּׁה הַבָּאָה אֶל־בֵּיתוֹ כְּרָחֵל וְכִלְאָה אֲשֶׁר בָּנוּ שְׁתֵּיהֶם אֶת־בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל וַעֲשֵׂה־תְהִיל בְּאַפְרָתָה וּקְרֵא־שֵׁם בְּבֵית לָחֶם:

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.

וַיְהִי בֵּיתוֹ כְּבֵית פֶּרֶץ אֲשֶׁר־יָלְדָה תָמָר לַיהוּדָה מִן־הַזָּרַע אֲשֶׁר יָתַן יְהוָה לָהּ מִן־הַנְּעֻרָה הַזֹּאת:

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.

וַיִּשָׁח בְּעֵז אֶת־רוֹת וַתְּהִי־לּוֹ לְאִשָּׁה וַיִּבֵּא אֵלֶיהָ וַיִּמְנוּ יְהוָה לָהּ הַרְבִּיּוֹן וַתֵּלֶד בֶּן:

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

14.

וַתֹּאמְרֵנָה הַנְּשִׂימִם אֶל־נְעֲמִי בְּרוּךְ יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר לֹא הִשְׁכִּית לָהּ גֹּאֵל הַיּוֹם וַיִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ בִּישָׁרְאֵל:

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.

וְהָיָה לָהּ לְמַשִּׁיב נְפֹשׁ וּלְכֹלֶלֶל אֶת־שִׁיבְתָהּ כִּי כִלְתָהּ אֲשֶׁר־אֶהְבֶּתָּ וְיָלְדָתוּ אֲשֶׁר־הִיא טוֹבָה לָהּ מִשִּׁבְעָה בָּנִים:

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.

וַתִּקַּח נְעֲמִי אֶת־הַלֵּל וַתִּשְׁתַּחֲוֶה בְּחִיקָה וַתְּהִי־לּוֹ לְאִמָּנָה:

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

ותקראנהּ לוֹ הַשְּׂכֵנֹת שֵׁם לְאִמֹּר יֵלֶד־בֵּן לְנַעֲמִי וּתְקַרְאֶנָּהּ שֵׁמוֹ עוֹבֵד הוּא אֶבְי־יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶבְי דָּוִד:

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.