

MEGILLAT RUTH – SOURCE SHEET

1. Midrash Rabba Ruth 2:14 – why was Ruth written?

אמר רבי זעירא, מגלה זו אין בה לא טמאה ולא טהרה, ולא אסור ולא התר. ולמה נכתבה? ללמדך כמה שָׁכַר טוב לגומלי חסדים.

Rabbi Ze'eira says, "This scroll does not have anything in it concerned with impurity or purity, nor what is forbidden and what is permitted. So why was it written? To teach us how great is the reward for those who perform kindnesses."

Chapter 1: Ruth remains with her aging, isolated mother-in-law, despite the fact that Naomi explicitly warns her that she will not marry or have a future in Bethlehem.

Chapter 2: Ruth voluntarily relinquishes her dignity and gathers produce in the field to obtain food for herself and her mother-in-law.

Chapter 3: Ruth agrees without question to Naomi's difficult instructions, to risk her reputation in offering herself to Boaz, in order to ensure Naomi's legacy.

Chapter 4: Ruth bears a child and gracefully exits the story, allowing Naomi to adopt the child as her own.

Do we subscribe to total self-negation as the paradigm of kindness? Is this a Jewish aspiration?

2. Zohar Chadash on Megillat Ruth – another reason Ruth was written

א"ר יוסי בן קסמא תמיה אני אם מגילה זו לא באה אלא כדי ליחס זרע דוד שבא מרות המואביה

R. Yosi ben Kisma says, "I would not be surprised if this Megilla were here simply to trace the genealogy of David, who was born from Ruth the Moabite."

3. Devarim 23:4-5 -- Why would King David's genealogy be of any concern?

לא-יבא עמוני ומואבי, בקהל ה'. גם דור עשירי לא-יבא להם בקהל ה' עד-עולם. על-דבר אשר לא-קדמו אתכם, בלחם ובמים, בדרך, בצאתכם ממצרים.

No Ammonite or Moabite shall come into the congregation of the Lord; even the tenth generation shall not come into the congregation of the Lord for eternity. Because they did not meet you with food and water on your journey after you left Egypt.

4. Yevamot 76b – the Ammonites and the Moabites

ה"ק שאול אי מפרץ אתי אי מזרח אתי... א"ל דואג האדומי עד שאתה משאיל עליו אם הגון הוא למלכות אם לאו שאל עליו אם ראוי לבא בקהל אם לאו מ"ט דקאתי מרות המואביה א"ל אבנר תנינא עמוני ולא עמונית מואבי ולא מואבית... דמפרש טעמא דקרא על אשר לא קדמו אתכם בלחם ובמים דרכו של איש לקדם ולא דרכה של אשה לקדם...

Saul said as follows: "Is he [David] descended from Peretz or from Zerach?"... Doeg Ha-Edomi replied, "Before you ask whether he is suitable for kingship or not, ask whether he is worthy to be admitted to the congregation or not! Why? Because he is descended from Ruth the Moabite!" Avner said, "We have learned, 'Ammonite men [are prohibited from joining the congregation], but not Ammonite women; Moabite men, but not Moabite women'... the reason [for their exclusion] is stated in the Torah – they did not greet them [the Israelites] with bread and water. It is usually the man to greets them and not the woman...."

5. Sifri, Devarim -- Appointing a King over Israel

"ואמרת אשימה עלי מלך" רבי נהוריי אומר הרי זה דבר גניי לישראל שנאמר "כי לא אותך מאסו כי אותי מאסו ממלוך עליהם." אמר רבי יהודה והלא מצוה מן התורה לשאול להם מלך, שנאמר "שום תשים עליך מלך" למה נענשו בימי שמואל? לפי שהקדימו על ידם.

And you will say, 'I will appoint for myself a king.' R. Nehorai said: This is a criticism of Israel, as it says, "It is not you whom they have rejected, but it is Me who they have rejected from reigning over them" (I Shmuel 8:7). R. Yehuda said: But is it not a commandment from the Torah to ask for a king, as it says, "You shall surely appoint for yourself a king" (Devarim 17)? Why, then, were they punished in the days of Shmuel? Because they asked for a king too early. (Sifri, Devarim 17:14)

6. 1 Samuel 17:12-15 -- King David's unremarkable family background

וַדָּוִד בֶּן-אִישׁ אֶפְרַתִּי הַזֶּה מִבֵּית לָחֶם יְהוּדָה וְשֵׁמוֹ יֵשׁוּעַ וְלוֹ שְׁמֹנֶה בָנִים וְהָאִישׁ בִּימֵי שָׁאוּל זָקֵן בָּא בְּאֲנָשִׁים:

David was the son of a certain Ephrathite of Bethlehem in Judah whose name was Jesse. He had eight sons, and in the days of Saul the man was already old, advanced in years.

וַיֵּלְכוּ שְׁלֹשֶׁת בְּנֵי-יֵשׁוּעַ הַגְּדֹלִים הַלְּכוּ אַחֲרֵי-שָׁאוּל לְמִלְחָמָה וְשֵׁם שְׁלֹשֶׁת בְּנָיו אֲשֶׁר הָלְכוּ בְּמִלְחָמָה אֱלִיאָב הַבְּכוֹר וּמִשְׁנֵהוּ אַבִּינָדָב וְהַשְּׁלִישִׁי שָׁמָה:

The three oldest sons of Jesse had left and gone with Saul to the war. The names of his three sons who had gone to the war were Eliab the first-born, the next Abinadab, and the third Shammah;

וַדָּוִד הוּא הַקָּטָן וְשֵׁלֶשָׁה הַגְּדֹלִים הַלְּכוּ אַחֲרֵי שָׁאוּל:

David was the youngest. The three oldest had followed Saul.

וַדָּוִד הָלַךְ וְשָׁב מֵעַל שָׁאוּל לְרִעוּת אֶת-צֹאן אָבִיו בֵּית-לָחֶם:

David would go back and forth from attending on Saul to shepherd his father's flock in Bethlehem.

7. Boaz the redeemer

וְעַתָּה כִּי אֲמַנֶּם כִּי אִם גֹּאֵל אֲנִי וְגַם יֵשׁ גֹּאֵל קְרוֹב מִמֶּנִּי: לֵינִי אֲהִי הַלְוִיָּה וְהִיא בְּבִקְרָא אִם-יִגְאָלָהּ טוֹב יִגְאָל אִם-לֹא יִחַפֵּץ לִגְאָלָהּ וּגְאֻלְתֶּיהָ אֲנִי חַי־ה' שְׁכָבִי עַד-הַבֹּקֶר:

But while it is true I am a redeeming kinsman, there is another redeemer closer than I. Stay for the night. Then in the morning, if he will act as a redeemer, good! let him redeem. But if he does not want to act as redeemer for you, I will do so myself, as God lives! Lie down until morning.

8. Dr. Yael Ziegler - Ruth, Boaz, and the theme of National Redemption

... the notion of redemption in Megillat Ruth should be understood on three separate levels: its simple meaning, and two deeper layers of meaning. The primary sense of the text records Ruth's own intention – she seeks her personal redemption, which is also the redemption of the house of Elimelekh.

Another deeper level of meaning refers to the urgently needed national redemption during the period of the Judges, a devastating time for the Jewish nation. Ruth's declaration that Boaz is a redeemer may unwittingly refer to the ultimate goal of the union of Boaz and Ruth. The son who is born to them at the conclusion of the Megillah may provide the solution for the reigning chaos: the beginning of a dynasty which can restore stability to the land, build the Temple, and create a strong religious and social infrastructure. Boaz has the ability to function not merely as the "go'el" of Ruth and the house of Elimelekh, he may also act as the "go'el" of the nation.

The final layer of meaning for the word "go'el" may refer to the ultimate, future national redemption, which is, of course, the conventional usage of the term "geula." This last level of understanding offers an insight into a much deeper meaning of this brief book, one which bears upon the most fervent aims of the Tanakh narratives: the manner in which the Jewish nation can arrive at an ideal society.

Megillat Ruth should be regarded as a book that facilitates the future "geula" of the nation, the eschatological vision often referred to as "the end of days." This idea draws inspiration from the tranquil picture drawn by Isaiah 11. It is a vision of justice and righteousness, faithfulness, and peace between creatures. Above all, the end of days is a time in which all creatures are overwhelmed with knowledge of God, an existence which generates the erasure of evil and perversions.

But this vision does not erupt spontaneously. It revolves around the appearance of an ideal king, a shoot which will grow from the stump of Yishai that will facilitate this idyllic scenario. In other words, this king will emerge from the Davidic line. This king is described as a man upon whom rests the spirit of God, which grants him the spirit of wisdom and insight, counsel and valor, knowledge, and reverence for God. This king is also a product of our narrative, born of the union of Ruth and Boaz, who have thereby produced national redemption both for their current situation and for the future.

The meeting between Boaz and Ruth on the threshing floor contains the stirrings of the ultimate redemption of the Jewish people. A Midrashic reading recognizes this deeper level in the narrative and suggests a homiletic reading of Boaz's words to Ruth:

"Lodge here tonight, and it will be in the morning, if he shall redeem you, good, he shall redeem, but if he shall not desire to redeem you, I myself shall redeem you, I swear by God. Lie until the morning."

The Zohar draws our attention to the deeper meaning in the Megilla by regarding these words of Boaz as the words of God addressing His nation during the course of their long years in exile:

"Lodge here tonight – You are presently in exile and are occupied informing your sons [in exile] of Torah and good deeds. If your good deeds shall testify in your favor to deliver you, then you shall be delivered. But if not, I shall redeem you Myself, swears God. Lie until the morning – Until the light comes and lights [the way for] your delivery." (Zohar Chadash, Ruth 8)