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David, the Book of Ruth, and Its Place in a Larger National Storyline

J. Andrew Dearman
Fuller Theological Seminary

Introduction

The purpose of this essay is to offer supporting data for the proposal that the composer(s) of the book of Ruth drew upon and alludes to a larger national storyline to show that YHWH was at work among David's tribe and clan to bring forth his dynastic rule in Israel. On the one hand, the reception history of the book is congenial to a connection with the biblical figure of David, given the generations of Jews and Christians who have taken cues from its concluding genealogical formulae (4:17b; 4:18–22) to see the preceding narrative in light of Davidic rule, past and future.¹ On the other hand, modern, historical-critical scholarship has largely concentrated on other matters of the book's interpretation. There seem to be two related reasons for this. The first is that for decades concern for genre analysis of the book has been broadly influenced by a comment of Goethe² and the pioneering form-critical analysis of Gunkel.³ Their comments are almost always noted by subsequent commentators and the book is commonly described by the

¹ In terms of reception history and post-biblical Jewish interpretation, see Jacob Neusner, *The Mother of the Messiah in Judaism: The Book of Ruth* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity International Press, 1993). See also footnote 25 below. For early Christian appropriation of the book, see already Matt 1:3–6 and Luke 3:31–33.

² "(D)as lieblichste kleine Ganze betrachtet werden kann, das uns episch und idyllisch überliefert worden ist," in Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Berliner Ausgabe. Poetische Werke* (Band 3, Berlin: Aufbau Verlag, 1960) p. 165.

³ Hermann Gunkel, "Ruth," *Reden und Aufsätze* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1913) pp. 65–92 used the terms "idyll" and "novella" to describe the book. See further E. F. Campbell, Jr., "The Hebrew Short Story: Its Form, Style and Provenance," pp. 83–101 in H. N. Bream, R. D. Heim, and C. A. Moore, ed., *A Light Unto My Path: Old Testament Studies in Honor of Jacob M. Myers* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1974).

related terms “idyll,” “novella,” or “short story,” with a presenting problem to be overcome, and with certain characters who become positive role models. Within this genre-based approach David receives little attention, given that he is only noted at the end of the book and is not a character developed in it. There is, of course, much to be learned from this approach to the book and it does not, furthermore, deny the influence of traditions about David upon the perspective and preservation of the book, even if these traditions are not deemed primary to the crafting of the narrative as such.⁴

The second and related reason is a plausible literary judgment that the longer genealogical list in 4:18–22, which moves from Perez to David, is an addition to the novella or short story proper.⁵ Some interpreters have drawn a similar conclusion regarding the other explicit reference in the book to David (4:17b), namely, that it too is an editorial addition to an earlier narrative. Such judgments are wrapped up in discussions of the date of the book, with some proposing a pre-exilic origin (with the genealogical formulae as editorial additions in the post-exilic period) and others opting for a post-exilic origin to the narrative (though again it may have subsequent editorial updates).⁶ As with the modern discussion of genre,

⁴ One common way to interpret the book is to see it opposing an unwarranted exclusion of foreigners in Israel and/or marriage restrictions set out in Ezra and Nehemiah, using David’s family as an example. For representative discussions and approaches, Georg Braulik, “The Book of Ruth as Intra-Biblical Critique of the Deuteronomic Law,” *AcT* 19 (1999), pp. 1–20; Yair Zakovitch, *Das Buch Rut: Ein jüdischer Kommentar* (Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1999); André LaCocque, *Ruth: A Continental Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004); Agnethe Siquans, “Foreignness and Poverty in the Book of Ruth: A Legal Way for a Poor Foreign Woman to be Integrated into Israel,” *JBL* 128 (2009), pp. 443–52; Tamara Cohn Eskenazi and Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *The JPS Bible Commentary: Ruth* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2011).

⁵ C. McCarthy, “The Davidic Genealogy in the Book of Ruth,” *Proceedings of the Irish Biblical Association* 9 (1985), pp. 53–62. He concludes that 4:18–22 is an addition to the narrative, post-exilic in date, and that its contents are derived from 1 Chron 2:3–15.

⁶ See representative discussions in O. Loretz, *Das Verhältnis zwischen Rut-Story und David-Genealogie im Rut-Buch*, *ZAW* 89 (1977), pp. 124–26; an earlier form of the story ended at 4:16; E. F. Campbell, Jr., *Ruth* (Garden City: Doubleday & Co: 1975), pp. 169–73: the basic narrative is pre-exilic and 4:18–22 is a post-exilic addition; Erich Zenger, *Das*

such a literary judgment about 4:18–22 or 4:17b does not deny the influence of traditions about the figure of David on the preservation of the narrative proper; indeed, in this case it assumes that an editor wanted to underscore such a connection between narrative and royal figure! Nevertheless, it also assumes that an earlier narrative, *sans* the genealogical formulae, may have been composed with purposes in mind unrelated to David, and that it needed such explicit references to confirm a connection or to widen the book's appeal.

Genre

The value of the modern discussion of Ruth's genre is borne out in the manner in which matters of plot and character development can be coordinated and evaluated.⁷ Nevertheless, there is more to be said about the particularities of Ruth's account with respect to plot and detail and their connections to a national storyline and David. Nielsen, for example, who accepts the basic genre designation of novella for the book, claims that, "the texts in the Old Testament that Ruth most closely resembles are the patriarchal narratives."⁸ She means that in matters such as (A.) the problem of barrenness, (B.) the motif of an extra-ordinary sexual scene, (C.) surrogates for conception and birth of children, (D.) explicit references to ancestral figures, and (E.) the *tóledóth* genealogical formula, Ruth's novella is particularly influenced by the ancestral accounts in Genesis that also have these things:

A. *Barrenness of women:*

Sarah, 16:1–2; Rebecca, 25:21; Rachel, 29:31//Ruth

B. *Extra-ordinary sexual scene:*

Buch Ruth (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1986; 2nd edition, 1992), pp. 93–95: the primary narrative is post-exilic in written form and 4:17b, 18–22 are editorial additions to it.

⁷ Dana Nolan Fewell and David Miller Gunn, *Compromising Redemption: Relating Characters in the Book of Ruth* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1999); Marjo C.A. Korpel, *The Structure of the Book of Ruth* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 2001); Kristin Moen Saxegaard, *Character Complexity in the Book of Ruth* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010).

⁸ Kirsten Nielsen, *Ruth: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), p. 7.

Lot's daughters, 19:30–38; Leah for Rachel, 29:15–30; Tamar and Judah, 38:12–19//Ruth and Boaz at the threshing floor⁹

C. *Surrogates for conception and offspring:*

Hagar, 16:1–6; Bilhah and Zilpah, 30:1–13; Judah, 38:1–30//Boaz

D. *References to ancestor figures:*

Rachel and Leah, 29:1–30:24 Judah, Tamar and Perez, 38:1–30//Ruth 4:11–12

E. *Toledoth genealogical formula:*

e.g. 36:1; 37:2//Ruth 4:18–22.¹⁰

From this perspective, Ruth's novella is intended to further a national storyline rooted in the ancestral accounts in Genesis and to update it by reference to events "in the days of the Judges" (1:1) that prepared the way for David's family and his dynasty. With varying emphases, others support her basic literary and intertextual approach to the book.¹¹ Van Wolde's conclusion is persuasive: "The relationship between the book of Ruth and the patriarchal narratives in Genesis...is a matter not just of direct similarities between persons or terms, but of an underlying pattern."¹² She and Nielsen represent an appreciation for the book's basic genre identification, coupled with recognition that thematic and intertextual links to the accounts of Israelite ancestors impact its shape and

⁹ There is no explicit statement in 3:6–13 that Boaz and Ruth engaged in sexual relations at the threshing floor. The account does, however, have sexual overtones and represents an extra-ordinary encounter between the two.

¹⁰ Nielsen, *Ruth*, p. 27, proposes that the genealogy is the book's "basic premise and starting point" as part of its defense of David and his family. Even if 4:18–22 is an addition, Gilles Gerleman, *Ruth/Das Hobelied* (Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1965), pp. 5–10, 38, also sees the book's purpose as defending the family of David and explaining his Moabite connections as part of God's leading of the people.

¹¹ Harold Fisch, "Ruth and the Structure of Covenant History," *VT* 32 (1982), pp. 425–37; Ellen van Wolde, *Ruth and Naomi* (London: SCM Press, 1997); Irmtraud Fischer, "The Book of Ruth: A 'Feminist' Commentary on the Torah?," pp. 24–29 in Athalya Brenner, ed., *Ruth and Esther. A Feminist Companion to the Bible* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999); idem, *Rut* (2nd edition; Freiburg: Herder, 2005). Note the considerable list of "parallels" between Genesis and Ruth provided by Robert Hubbard, *Ruth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), p. 40.

¹² *Ruth and Naomi*, pp. 131–32.

perspective. The elements of threat, character development, and resolution in Ruth are not just constituent elements of a novella, generally speaking; their particularities are decisively shaped by material in the Genesis ancestral accounts and intended for a similar purpose, namely, to show that God is at work through a particular family and tribe to bring blessing to them and through them for future generations. Although the Ruth novella stands alone, literarily speaking, it depends upon a larger storyline of national interest and interprets it for readers.

Genealogical Formulae

The two genealogies contain the only explicit references to David in the book (4:17b; 22). They place the marriage of Boaz and Ruth and the birth of Obed in the context of an extended family history of ten generations that stretches from Perez (cf. Gen 38) to the person of David. They also complement a reference to Perez earlier in the chapter (4:12). One textual tradition (Old Latin) goes to an eleventh generation in the concluding verse with the mention of Solomon. Genealogies are constituent parts of Old Testament narratives, providing social mapping as well familial data, but no other Old Testament book concludes with one. Ruth is unique in this regard, whatever its compositional history.

Ruth 4:17 indicates that the son born to Boaz and Ruth was named Obed, who was “the father of Jesse, the father of David.” Ruth 4:18–22 repeats and supplements these data: “These are the generations (*tōledōt*) of Perez: Perez fathered Hezron, Hezron fathered Ram, Ram fathered Aminadab, Aminadab fathered Nahshon, Nahshon fathered Salmah, Salmon fathered Boaz, Boaz fathered Obed, Obed fathered Jesse, and Jesse fathered David” (Masoretic Text). As commentators are quick to point out, there are variants preserved for several names in 4:18–22 in both Hebrew and early versions, along with parallel texts in Matt 1:3–6 and Luke 3:31–33.¹³ They reflect fascinating matters in textual transmission history, but are less important overall for exploring the book’s relationship to traditions about King David and will be commented upon only sparingly.

The genealogical formulae follow the exclamations of the village women in 4:14–15, 17a, that Obed is a “kinsman redeemer (*go’ēl*)”

¹³ Campbell, *Ruth*, pp. 170–72.

and “son” for Naomi (mother of Mahlon, Ruth’s deceased husband).¹⁴ Thus there are two identities for Obed given in chapter 4, one which links him to the property and identity of the household of Mahlon, and another given in the genealogical formulae themselves, which place him in the line of Boaz and David. A similar situation is set out in Gen 38, an account known to and drawn upon by the composer(s) of Ruth. Tamar, the childless widow of Er, conceives twins by an unwitting surrogate, namely, her father-in-law Judah, after Judah had refused to allow his youngest son Shelah to engage Tamar in levirate marriage (cf. Deut 25:5–10). Perez and Zerah are linked elsewhere in the OT with the line of Judah (Gen 46:12; Num 26:19–22; 1 Chron 2:3–4; Ruth 4:12), their biological father, just as Obed is linked with Boaz (Ruth 4:21; 1 Chron 2:12), rather than Mahlon. Clearly the genealogical data themselves do not preserve all of the familial roles played by either Perez or Obed in the tribal inheritance of Judah.

The Hebrew phrase “these are the generations (*toledōth*)” in 4:18 occurs elsewhere in the OT to provide genealogical data for readers.¹⁵ Its employment is frequently associated with the Priestly writer or tradent, which means for some interpreters that it is post-exilic in origin and a reason to consider 4:18–22 as an appendix to an earlier narrative. As noted above, the genealogical data for the Judahite clan of Perez in 1 Chron 2:3–15 closely overlap with the linear genealogy in Ruth 4:18–22 and the brief notice in Gen 38:27–30. In formal terms, however, the two genealogies in 1 Chronicles 2 and Ruth 4 are separate sources. Ruth 4:18–22 is a typical descending genealogy, while the longer data collection in 1 Chron 2:3–15 is segmented. Possibly the data in 1 Chronicles 2 and Ruth 4:18–22 derive from a common antecedent and were included in their respective documents at a similar time. The two accounts share one name in common over against a variety of variants among early versions and textual witnesses, Ram the father of Aminadab (Ruth 4:19; 1 Chron 2:9–10).¹⁶

¹⁴ According to Ruth 4:5, 10, the marriage of Ruth to a kinsman of her dead husband was to maintain the name of the deceased with his inheritance through the birth of an heir.

¹⁵ Gen 2:4; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10, 27; 25:12, 19; 36:1, 9; 37:2; Num 3:1; 1 Chron 1:29.

¹⁶ In Greek texts, the name is Ἀρᾶν or Ἀραμ or Ἀδμιν; Cf. BHS and Matt 1:3–4; Luke 3:33. See also footnote 21 below for another shared

Whether one or more of the genealogies are editorial additions is a subjective literary judgment, given that all surviving textual forms of the book contain them. If the book is a post-exilic work, as a recent detailed examination plausibly concludes, then there is less reason to see 4:18–22 as an appendix.¹⁷ Nevertheless, even if 4:18–22 (or less plausibly 4:17b) is deemed an editorial update, the discussion above regarding various connections to the ancestral accounts in the book do not support a thematic difference between the genealogy reaching back to Perez and the preceding narrative. As the book of Genesis combines genealogical lists with narratives for selected entities, so does the book of Ruth. The uniqueness of the latter is that the genealogy concludes the account in an explicit effort to point forward, literarily speaking, to a subsequent phase in national history brought about by YHWH's providential work, whereas in Genesis the *toledoth* formulae function more like hinges within the book, introducing and narrowing a subject matter and elaborating on select figures.¹⁸ Ruth also has connections to the Chronicler, who likewise draws on earlier sources in linking Israel's history by combining genealogical data (1 Chron 1–9) and narrative.

Family Identity

The book introduces its first characters as “a man from Bethlehem in Judah” and his immediate family who are described as “Ephrathites from Bethlehem” (1:1–2). These identity markers provide local color and verisimilitude for the account, yet are not incidental to it, as if Ruth's composer could just as easily portray Elimelech's family as Abiezrites from Ophrah in Manasseh (cf. Judg 6:11–15). That identity would not connect the family to Judah and David, as do Bethlehem and Ephrathah. David is identified elsewhere as the son of an “Ephrathite” from Bethlehem named Jesse (1 Sam 17:12). The common description of Elimelech and Jesse is possibly a coincidence, but not likely so, as they and Boaz are the only men in the OT specifically identified with the double

attribute between Ruth and the genealogical data for the tribe of Judah in 1 Chron 2:3–4:23.

¹⁷ Peter Hon Wan Lau, *Identity and Ethics in the Book of Ruth: A Social Identity Approach* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2010), pp. 145–90.

¹⁸ See further, Matthew A. Thomas, *These are the Generations: Identity, Promise, and the 'Toledot' Formula* (New York: T & T Clark International, 2011).

entity Ephrathah/Bethlehem. The book of Ruth, which twice refers to Jesse (4:17b; 22), thus points readers to a specific Ephrathite family from the very beginning and one with roots in a larger storyline (4:11–12). Like bookends, the description of Elimelech and his family in 1:1–2 and the concluding genealogical formulae in 4:17b–22 illumine and interpret one another.¹⁹

The name Ephrath/Ephrathah does have some obscurities related to it in other biblical references, but they cannot be dealt with adequately in this context.²⁰ In Ruth, Ephrathah is a geographical name overlapping with Bethlehem (4:11) and possibly also a clan name (1:2). There is a shaping tradition at work in some of the references elsewhere to relate Ephrathah to Bethlehem and David. For example, Rachel's burial is noted twice in Genesis as located on the Ephrathah road (35:19; 48:7) and in both cases an editor adds an explanatory comment that Ephrathah/Ephrath is Bethlehem. Micah 5:2 contains a prophecy that one from the past shall be ruler of Israel and he shall come from "Bethlehem Ephrathah," an otherwise insignificant clan. It is part of a *David redivivus* tradition found in several prophetic books (Hos 3:5; Isa 11:1–9; Jer 23:5–6; 30:9; 33:15; Ezek 34:23–24) and unique among them in drawing upon the geography of David's origin. Finally, there is the New Testament reference to Bethlehem as the "city of David" (Luke 2:4, 11). One cannot determine how far back in Jewish lore such a term goes; it is, however, another example of David's impact in shaping geographic terminology and a national narrative that uses it.

Building the House of Israel

Those who witness the transaction in the gate offer Boaz felicitations for progeny and increased standing in Ephrathah/Bethlehem (4:11–12). There are remarkable elements in this communal response to the pending marriage of Ruth and Boaz, which are illuminated through allusion and echo to other texts. Among other things, those present express hope that Ruth, who is coming into Boaz's "house," will be like Rachel and Leah, who "built the House of Israel," and that through the "seed" the Lord

¹⁹ So Lau, *Identity*, p. 53; Nielsen, *Ruth*, pp. 3, 23.

²⁰ See discussion in Campbell, *Ruth*, pp. 54–55. Cf. 1 Chron 2:19, where Ephrath is the wife of Caleb; 2:50–51, where Salma, a descendant of Ephrathah, is the father or founder of Bethlehem; and 4:4, where Ephrathah is the father or founder of Bethlehem.

will give him through her, his “house” will be like that of “Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah.” We should take careful note of the combining of family, tribal and national identities in the people’s response. This is no generic blessing. Every name just listed, personal or geographic, can be found in the ancestral narratives in Genesis. The line of kinship and place runs from Boaz’s “house,” sometimes translated as “family,” to Ephrathah / Bethlehem, to the house of Perez, to Judah, the progenitor of the tribe, and to Israel, the progenitor of the nation as household. This is perhaps too linear a way to present the data, but they are impressive in connecting Boaz and Ruth to an extensive family history as part of a larger national narrative. Even in its brevity, Ruth’s book draws on these ancestral family traditions (i.e., those before the “days of the Judges”) more explicitly than do the books of Judges and 1–2 Samuel. Indeed, these books lack any reference to the activities of the ancestors named in Ruth 4:11–12 or any of the ancestors named in David’s genealogy before Jesse. As noted previously, Judah, Tamar and Perez also occur in 1 Chronicles, a book that has portions of Judah’s genealogical data in common with Ruth, (4:17b, 18–22; 1 Chron 2:3–15). The ancestral traditions in Ruth 4:11–12 are thus specifically related to data preserved in Genesis and 1 Chronicles, even as they point forward to David, providing another link between the narrative proper and the genealogical formulae.²¹

Rachel and Leah are paired in Genesis and Ruth, but nowhere else in OT texts. The women and their servant surrogates, Bilhah and Zilpah, are the mothers of Jacob/Israel’s sons (Gen 35:23–26), whose descendants comprise the later “House of Israel.” In terms of a national storyline, this puts Ruth and her commitments to Mahlon and Naomi in exalted company, even as her personal story has parallels to Jacob’s family dynamics. The ancestral narratives in Genesis 12–50, for all their complexity and detail, are shaped as a four-generation, extended family history that leads to a nation called Israel. The felicitations to Boaz in Bethlehem’s gate assume elements in this larger narrative matrix and draw from them.

²¹ Both the account in Ruth and that in 1 Chron 2:3–4:23 reckon with the inclusion of foreign women in the tribe of Judah. See Gary N. Knoppers, “‘Married into Moab’: the exogamy practiced by Judah and his descendants in the Judahite lineages,” pp. 170–91 in Christian Frevel, ed., *Mixed Marriages: Intermarriage and Group Identity in the Second Temple Period* (London: T & T Clark, 2011).

As noted above, Judah, Tamar and Perez are the specific tribal/clan/household connections for Boaz and David among the descendants of Israel. Their names in Ruth echo the accounts in Genesis 38 and 1 Chron 2:3–4, where the continuation of the biological line of Judah is at stake and Judah's widowed daughter-in-law produces heirs by unexpected means. The parallels between Ruth and Tamar, on the one hand, and Boaz and Judah on the other, are dramatic and cleverly signaled through brief allusion. They remind readers that the marriage of Boaz and Ruth comes at yet another crucial juncture in a family history overseen by YHWH.

There is more echo and allusion to these ancestral narratives in the remark that Rachel and Leah “built (*bānāh*) the House of Israel.” The phrase “to build a house,” when used of kinship ties rather than construction of a building, is a metaphor, idiomatic in expression and embedded in cultural practices different than those of the modern West. The metaphor's vehicle is physical construction of a domicile; its tenor is the establishment and preservation of a family, and can include the use of surrogates for procreation purposes. On occasion, the verb alone can have this sense. Rachel encouraged her husband to procreate with her servant Bilhah so that “I can be built (*niphāl*) from her” (Gen 30:3; cf. 16:2 and Sarah/Hagar). The noun *bayit* has physical connotations (domicile, physical residence, building, palace, and temple) and kinship connotations (household, family, clan, tribe, dynasty, and patrimonial nation-state), depending on use in context. It is used four times in 4:11–12, representing various kinship identities. The phrase “build a house” is used in Deut 25:9, where it refers to the perpetuation of a family, just as it does in Ruth 4:11. More specifically, it occurs in a case law (Deut 25:5–10) regarding a married man who dies without an heir. The presenting issue of the case law is whether or not his brother then takes the widow as wife in order to “build a house” for the deceased, i.e. to provide an heir for him. The phrase in Ruth may also allude to the ancestors' various employments of surrogates to increase their offspring, for this is something the narrative has in common with the accounts of Rachel, Leah, Judah, and Tamar. The phrase portends what Ruth and Boaz (a surrogate for Mahlon, cf. 4:5, 10) will accomplish in providing an heir for the deceased.

“Building the House of Israel” is also an echo of a promise to David that YHWH “will build a house” for him (stated explicitly in 1 Chron 17:10). That promise is part of a central tradition about

David²² and his dynastic rule over Israel, where the word *bayit* is used repeatedly with several of the physical and kinship connotations noted above (1 Chron 17:1–27/2 Sam 7:1–29). To summarize: David, who has built his *house* in Jerusalem, would like to build a *house* for YHWH. The prophet Nathan responds that instead it is YHWH who will “build a *house*” for David (*bānāh*, 1 Chron 17:10; *‘āsāh*, 2 Sam 7:11). David’s “descendant” (*zera*), who follows him in dynastic succession, is the one who will build a *house* for YHWH. David prays with thanksgiving to YHWH that “the *house* of your servant David will be established before you” (1 Chron 17:24/2 Sam 7:26). In Ruth’s novella, the “House of Israel” built proleptically by Rachel, Leah and Ruth, extends all the way to the house of David built by YHWH. That is the nature of an echo that goes back and forth, literarily speaking, between texts with common terms and themes.

There are only small differences between the versions of 2 Samuel 7 and 1 Chronicle 17 regarding the house of David and YHWH. Of the two, the Chronicler uses the phrase “build a house” in the sense of perpetuate and establish a family (17:10), as in Ruth 4:11. The parallel passage in 2 Samuel has the verb *‘āsāh* instead of *bānāh* (7:11). It amounts to the same sense as the Chronicler’s formulation, but is a step removed from verbal correspondence in Ruth. Given previous observations about the links between Ruth and Chronicles, the closer connection between the two here is not surprising.

There is at least one more echo in Ruth 4:12, also reverberating back to the ancestral history as well as forward to David’s house. It comes in the expressed hope that YHWH will give Boaz “offspring,” literally “seed” (*zera*), through Ruth. The noun is a collective singular and readily refers to one or more offspring. We should note that it is YHWH who will give Boaz offspring. Behind such an expression are dramatic accounts in the ancestral narratives of Genesis, where wombs had been closed until YHWH acted. It was so with Sarah (Gen 16:1–2), Rebecca (Gen 25:21), and Rachel (Gen 29:31). Until her marriage to Boaz, it had been that way with Ruth. In the literary shaping of these narratives is an emphasis on the *seed* of promise (e.g. Gen 12:7; 15:2, 5; 22:16–18; 26:24; 28:13–15), when wombs are opened, children born, and the family continues

²² Michael Avioz, *Nathan’s Oracle (2 Samuel) and Its Interpreters* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2005).

toward an expansive blessing promised to its *offspring/seed* (Gen 22:17–18; cf. 12:1–3).²³ That blessing even includes kings and rulers to come from the seed of promise (35:11–12; 49:10 = from Judah). The felicitation of the crowd in reference to *seed* is almost prophet-like. The echo moves forward from 4:12 to the *seed* that becomes king over Israel, as made explicit in the genealogical formulae that conclude the book.

YHWH's Full Reward and Wings

In his first encounter with Ruth (2:12), Boaz offers the following blessing: “May the Lord repay your effort and may your wages be full from the Lord the God of Israel, to whom you come to have refuge under his wings.” The blessing reflects general Israelite piety in action. Boaz offers her praise and blessing for the manner in which she has cared for her mother-in-law (2:11) and he apparently takes her presence in the field as more of the same. Somewhat oddly, he initially addresses her as “daughter” (2:7), but this may be taken as a polite gesture and possibly reflects his status as a beneficent older member of the community. The terminology, however, deserves further scrutiny in light of the larger family history of which Ruth and Boaz are a part.

The latter part of the blessing is a poetic metaphor used six times in the Psalter, where there are various formulations of taking refuge with YHWH and his “wings” (Psa 17:8; 36:8; 57:1; 61:5[4E]; 63:8[7E]; 91:4). These and Boaz’s blessing to Ruth comprise the seven instances of the metaphor in the OT. YHWH’s “wings” (singular *kanāp*) may liken his protective act to that of a bird (cf. Psa 91:4) with its young or possibly refer to the winged cherubim of the temple sanctum (cf. Psa 61:5), which represent YHWH’s enthroned presence among his people. Within the book itself Boaz’s blessing on Ruth has a dramatic echo when she requests that he spread his garment (literally “wing”) over her to fulfill the role of a kinsman-redeemer (3:9). In her case, the spread garment symbolizes a man taking a woman in marriage (cf. Ezek 16:8; Deut

²³ T.D. Alexander, “From Adam to Judah: the Significance of the Family Tree in Genesis,” *EtQ* 61 (1989), pp. 5–19; idem, “Further Observations on the Term ‘Seed’ in Genesis,” *TynBul* 48 (1997), pp. 363–67; James Hamilton, “The Seed of the Woman and the Blessing of Abraham,” *TynBul* 58 (2007), pp. 253–73. See the further development of this theme in Gal 3:6–18.

23:1[22:30E]; 27:20). In the artistry of the composer, the echo between 2:12 and 3:9 functions like promise and fulfillment. Whereas Boaz initially sought YHWH's fit response to Ruth's familial fidelity, circumstances bring him to the fore as a redeemer (*gō'el*) in extending a *wing* for Ruth's security and the preservation of clan identity.

Given the exclusivity of the metaphor to the Psalms, the question can be asked if Ruth's composer also draws on some or all of these texts as a self-conscious echo of David's prayers? We may be helped in this matter by superscriptions to five of the six psalms under consideration, since they connect David to their respective contents. Psalm 91 lacks a superscription. Psalm 17 is a "prayer of David"; 36 belongs to "David, servant of the Lord"; Psalm 57 is David's plea "when he fled from Saul into a cave" (cf. 1 Sam 24); Psalm 61 is "of/for David;" and Psalm 63 is from David's time "in the wilderness of Judah." The superscriptions, of course, are secondary headings to the psalms themselves and repositories of interpretive traditions for them that accrued over a considerable time.²⁴ They pick up on the traditions preserved elsewhere of David's musical skills (1 Sam 16:14–23; 2 Sam 23:1; Amos 6:5), composing of psalms (2 Sam 22/Psa 18), and organization of the temple choir and liturgy (1 Chron 25), joining him to individual compositions in the Psalter and sometimes linking them to events in his life (as in Psa 57 and 63). The question here is also a literary and tradition-historical one. It can be argued plausibly that Boaz and the psalmists simply drew upon stock phrases from communal Israelite piety, and though they do indeed have the metaphor of YHWH's wings in common, we should not ascribe allusive intention to Ruth's composer. Moreover, two difficult matters are joined when trying to coordinate the composition of the book of Ruth with the growth of the Davidic tradition and the superscriptions to the psalms.²⁵ Nevertheless, given the links elsewhere in Ruth to

²⁴ Adrian H. W. Curtis, "'A Psalm of David, When...': Reflections on Some Psalm Titles in the Hebrew Bible," pp. 49–60 in James K. Aitken, Jeremy M. S. Clines, and Christl M. Maier, ed., *Interested Readers. Essays on the Hebrew Bible in Honor of D. J. A. Clines* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013).

²⁵ According to a *baraita* in the Talmud (Baba Bathra 14b) on the order of biblical writings, Ruth preceded the collection of Psalms as an introduction to David's compositions.

David, we might then ask if it is a coincidence that Boaz and David are the only two named figures in the OT who speak of YHWH's protective wings. It is probably no more a coincidence than that Elimelech, Jesse and Boaz are the only named figures described as Ephrathites from Bethlehem. Boaz indeed blesses Ruth with the language of Israelite piety, but in doing so, he also speaks like his descendant David, a supreme example of Israelite piety. The circumstances of David's great grandparents, whose story is being told precisely because they are his family, also reflect YHWH's preserving power. It is family history on a national scale that drives the composer to link Boaz, Ruth and David in an exquisitely told account.

Conclusion

Although it stands alone as a literary work, Ruth's novella or short story is fruitfully interpreted in light of its closest biblical parallels, namely the ancestral accounts in Gen 12–50, followed by the national history in 1 Chronicles, as well as other biblical texts to which it is linked through intertextual echo and allusion. The composer(s) presents the book as a part of a national storyline running from the ancestral accounts to the dynasty of David, with YHWH at work over generations to preserve a chosen family (the "House of Israel").