

# FACULTY CONTRIBUTIONS

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## DERIVING LAW FROM THE BIBLICAL NARRATIVE: THE BOOK OF RUTH

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The story is a familiar one: “in the days when the Judges judged,”<sup>1</sup> there was famine in Judeah. Elimelech, a man of wealth and property in Bethlehem, along with his wife and two sons, migrated to the Land of Moab east of the River Jordan. There Elimelech and his sons perished, leaving his wife (Naomi) and her two Moabite daughters-in-law (Ruth and Orpah) destitute, widowed and alone.

Naomi decides to return to Bethlehem after she learns that the famine there has abated. She orders her daughters-in-law to remain in Moab. Orpah obeys, but Ruth clings to her mother-in-law and declares:

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1. *Ruth 1:1*, in MEGILLAS RUTH 61 (Rabbis Meir Scherman, & Nosson Zlotowitz eds., 1976). The Hebrew is clear: “in the days when the judges judged” really means “in the days of the judging of the judges.” THE FIVE MEGILLOTH 41 n.1 (Rev. Dr. A. Cohen ed., 1946). The King James version—“[i]n the days when the judges ruled”—has an entirely different meaning. *Ruth* 1:1 (King James). The Hebrew posits a time of corruption and lawlessness, a time when even the judges were being judged. In contrast, the King James version suggests that law was under the governance of judges which may fit the relatively peaceful and pastoral character of the narrative but is not faithful to the original Hebrew text.

Intreat me not to leave thee, *or* to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people *shall be* my people, and thy God my God: Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the LORD do so to me, and more also, *if ought* but death part thee and me.<sup>2</sup>

Naomi and Ruth return to Bethlehem in time for the in-gathering of the barley harvest. As was the custom, the indigent were permitted to glean after the grain harvesters. By chance the field where Ruth gleaned was the field of Boaz, a distant kinsman of Elimelech. Boaz was a man of wealth, advanced in years and recently widowed. Boaz orders his harvesters to leave sheaves for Ruth so that she can gather grain for herself and Naomi.

Naomi learns of Boaz's special kindness to Ruth, but she is doubly joyful. For through the kinship of Boaz and Ruth's late husband, Naomi sees the chance for Ruth to remarry under the law of Levirate marriage (*yibum*)—a brother's obligation to redeem the name and land of a deceased male sibling who dies without heirs by marrying his widow.<sup>3</sup> Naomi advises Ruth on how to approach Boaz. A near relative—rabbinic legend has it that it was Elimelech's brother<sup>4</sup> and, therefore, Ruth's late husband's uncle—declines to take Ruth possibly because she is a Moabitess. Ruth and Boaz then join in marriage. The issue of their union is Obed, who is nursed and raised by Naomi. Obed becomes the father of Jesse who is the father of David.

An idyllic narrative of classical beauty and simplicity. But what has it to do with law? And how can we account for the fact that in Jewish liturgical tradition the annual reading of the *Book of Ruth* occurs on the Festival of *Shavuoth*, the Festival of Weeks, a festival that commemorates the giving of the Torah (Jewish Law both written and oral) to Moses at Sinai? Why this association between pure narrative and the legal foundation document of the Jewish people?

2. *Ruth* 1:16-17 (King James). While this most famous verse from the *Book of Ruth* is thought to represent Ruth's conversion declaration, there is a view that Ruth remained a Moabitess. See MARC ZVI BRETTLER, HOW TO READ THE BIBLE 271 (2005).

3. *Deuteronomy* 25:5-6, in PENTATEUCH AND HAFTORAHS: HEBREW TEXT, ENGLISH TRANSLATION WITH COMMENTARY 855 (Rev. Dr. Joseph H. Hertz ed., 1964).

If brethren dwell together, and one of them die, and have no child . . . her husband's brother shall go in unto her, and take her to him to wife, and perform the duty of a husband's brother unto her [i.e., *levirate* marriage]. And it shall be, that the first-born which she beareth shall succeed in the name of his brother that is dead, that his name be not blotted out of Israel.

*Id.*

4. THE FIVE MEGILLOTH, *supra* note 1, at 48 n.1.

In a critical review of Thomas Cahill's book, *The Gifts of the Jews*, one writer has remarked that Cahill "pays scant if any attention to the specific framework in which . . . [Biblical] narratives operate and take their meaning. That framework is built on the premise that God revealed Himself to the Jews in the language of law."<sup>5</sup> But the *Book of Ruth* presents the converse of Prager's observation: not only that God revealed Himself in the language of law but that He revealed His law in the language of history, narrative, and story. It is said of Rabbi Akiva, the great Talmudic sage at the time of the destruction of the Second Temple, that from even a mere scrap of Biblical text he could derive "a mountain of law." Yet, the Ruth narrative contains no codes of legislation, no lists of commandments, no words of strict injunction. There are no acts of verbal or physical aggression, no harsh admonitions, no adversarial arguments or legal contentions. What, then, is the connection between Torah and Ruth, between law and story, between what Robert Cover called "Nomos and Narrative"?<sup>6</sup> What "mountains of law" can we extract from this particular literary text?

To be sure, the *Book of Ruth* deals with technical issues of Jewish Law (*halachah*)—for example, not only the requirement of *yibum* but the formalities for the nullification of that legal obligation (*chalitzah*) in actual cases.<sup>7</sup> But because of the variations in the story from the precise dictates of *yibum* as prescribed in the text of the Torah, there is misunderstanding as to whether or not in marrying Ruth, Boaz was acting as a *yovam* (i.e., the person obliged to perform *yibum*). Neither Boaz nor a kinsman even closer to Ruth, identified in the text only as the unnamed Ploni Almoni (i.e., a "Mr. So and So"—in other words, a "John Doe"), was legally required to marry Ruth as neither of them was actually her brother-in-law. Moreover,

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5. Yossi Prager, *Divine Rights: The Gifts of the Jews*, COMMENTARY, Nov. 1998, at 63, 64 (reviewing Cahill's book).
  6. See Robert M. Cover, *The Supreme Court 1982 Term: Foreword: Nomos and Narrative*, 97 HARV. L. REV. 4 (1983).
  7. *Deuteronomy 25:7-9*, in PENTATEUCH AND HAFTORAHS, *supra* note 3, at 855. ("And if the man like not to take his brother's wife . . . to raise up unto his brother a name in Israel; he will not perform the duty of a husband's brother . . . then shall his brother's wife . . . loose his shoe from off his foot . . ."). The obligation of *yibum* was abandoned when polygamy was abolished by Ashkenazic Jews by the 11<sup>th</sup> century, C.E. (A.D.). But the obligation of *chalitzah* has continued, and while rarely encountered these days (since childless widowhood is fairly uncommon) it does occur from time to time. For a contemporary example of the plight of observant Jewish widows (often among Sephardic Jews) when a brother-in-law fails to perform *chalitzah*, see Sharon Shenhav, *Elizabeth's Story*, THE JERUSALEM REPORT, Mar. 6, 1997, at 54. *Levirate* marriage is now prohibited in Israel and in most Jewish communities. RABBI ADIN STEINSALTZ, THE TALMUD - THE STEINSALTZ EDITION: A REFERENCE GUIDE 198 (1989).

the release effected by “Mr. So and So” to clear the way for Boaz was not done in conformity with the strict formalities of *chalitzah*. When Boaz buys the land left to Naomi and agrees to marry Ruth, Ruth removes his shoe. The majority opinion among the rabbinic interpreters holds that this is a reference to Boaz’s shoe, but under *chalitzah* it should have been the shoe of “Mr. So and So.” What is described, therefore, is not *chalitzah* but an ordinary land or business transaction (*kinyon*) executed by removing an article of clothing—in this case, a shoe.<sup>8</sup>

Nevertheless, despite its evident departure from the Torah mandate of *yibum*, Boaz is understood to have taken the place of a *yovam*, and in doing so performed, in the words of one authority “an act of heroic selflessness—a giving that beggars all others. Not of money, not even of time, but of the most precious of all possessions—the immortality conferred by children.”<sup>9</sup> For what was at stake here, and indeed the whole purpose behind the institution of *yibum*, was the perpetuation of the name of a deceased brother through the instrument of remarriage and procreation by his nearest kin. While *yibum* and *chalitzah* may appear to be odd, in ancient cultures it was not uncommon for such practices to exist so as “[t]o avert the calamity of the family line becoming extinct [and] of a man’s name perishing and his property going to others . . . .”<sup>10</sup>

As to the issue of conversion itself, the *Book of Ruth* follows the Biblical injunction that Hebrews not intermarry with the people of Moab—a rule that stemmed from Moabite refusal to provide food and drink to the Israelites in the desert prior to their entry into the Promised Land.<sup>11</sup> The bar against Moabite intermarriage applied only to Moabite males, however, since females, so it was thought, would not have been in the social position either to give or to deny sustenance to desert wanderers.<sup>12</sup> Ruth’s

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8. “Formerly this was done in Israel in cases of redemption and exchange transactions to validate all matters: one would draw off his shoe, and give it to the other. This was the process of ratification in Israel.” *Ruth 4:7*, in MEGILLAS RUTH, *supra* note 1, at 127, 129.
  9. MOSHE M. EISEMANN, A PEARL IN THE SAND: REFLECTIONS ON SHAVUOS, MEGILAS RUTH AND THE DAVIDIC KINGSHIP 35 (1997). The technical explanation of the significance of Boaz’s decision to marry Ruth and, for all practical purposes, to become the equivalent of a *yovam* is explained in greater detail in “The Nature of Yibum.” *Id.* at app.
  10. PENTATEUCH AND HAFTORAHS, *supra* note 3, at 855; ROBERT ALTER, THE FIVE BOOKS OF MOSES 1001 n.5 (2004) (“The practice of the levirate marriage seems to have shifted at different points in the biblical period. In the Book of Ruth, “brother” is clearly extended to cover the nearest available kinsman, even a distant cousin.”).
  11. *Deuteronomy 23:4-5*, in PENTATEUCH AND HAFTORAHS, *supra* note 3, at 846-47.
  12. *See id.* The name “Ruth”—[Heb. “Rut”] is derived from the Hebrew *geirut* meaning conversion. “Ruth” may also denote loyalty, friendship or she who satisfies. MALBIM

conversion and subsequent marriage to Boaz reflects this long-established Torah rule. Thus, in the law of conversion as well as in the law of *yibum* the Ruth narrative represents an important moment in Jewish historical and juridical development. Ruth gained acceptance as a legitimate religious convert,<sup>13</sup> but the illegitimacy of her Moabite origins continued to plague her descendants, David most of all.

But besides these specific *halachic* issues which the story raises, there are larger connections that can be drawn between the Ruth narrative and Torah law which may account for the special relationship the book bears to the Jewish legal as well as its liturgical tradition. These connections may explain why the *Book of Ruth* is read in the annual cycle on the *Shavuoth* holiday that celebrates the Giving of the Law. One reason is that David was born on and, later, died on *Shavuoth*. In order to honor his *yahrzeit*—the day of his death—Jews read the *Book of Ruth*, the story that tells of David's origins and ancestry. In addition, the holiday marks that time of year for the gathering of the first grain harvest. The image of Ruth among the gleaners of the barley fields becomes the indelible template of the Festival.

But beyond these customary explanations are the additional linkages that can be derived from a text that connects this purest of narratives with the deepest workings of the Law. The *Book of Ruth* is all about what is called in Hebrew “acts of loving kindness” best summarized by the word *chesed*. *Chesed* is not the same as charity. Charity is mandated in *Leviticus*: “And if thy brother be waxen poor, and his means fail with thee; then thou shalt uphold him: as a stranger and a settler shall he live with thee.”<sup>14</sup> In Jewish law, charity has a utilitarian purpose, and the giving of charity is a legal, not a moral, requirement. The donor has a *halachic* obligation to give while the poor have a legal right to receive. Moreover, charity can be rendered in material or in non-material forms but the categories of charitable giving are well-established.

In contrast, *chesed* covers an unlimited range and variety of possible human behaviors. It is the most comprehensive and fundamental of Jewish social values. Depending upon circumstances, *chesed* can be a legal

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ON RUTH 26 (Rabbi Shmuel Kurtz ed., 1999); see also EISEMANN, *supra* note 9, at 22; MEGILLAS RUTH, *supra* note 1, at 67. It was Boaz, the head of the Sanhedrin, who ruled that the *halachah* was already well-established that only Moabite males, and not Moabite females, were prohibited from converting. MALBIM ON RUTH, *supra* note 12, at 111 n.2.

13. JACOB NEUSNER, THE MIDRASH: AN INTRODUCTION 173-96 (1994); JACOB NEUSNER, INTRODUCTION TO RABBINIC LITERATURE 487-89 (1994). Neusner interprets the Ruth narrative as essentially a conversion story—the outsider becomes insider. For a different interpretation of the Ruth story, one which sees it as essentially a betrothal narrative, see ROBERT ALTER, THE ART OF BIBLICAL NARRATIVE 58-60 (1981).

14. *Leviticus 25:35*, in PENTATEUCH AND HAFTORAHS, *supra* note 3, at 536.

requirement or a moral imperative. *Chesed* was demonstrated in *Genesis* when Abraham showed hospitality to three angels who visited him on the Plains of Mamre.<sup>15</sup> As that example illustrates, *chesed* can be manifested even in circumstances where the law does not require it—when it is “beyond the letter of the law” or, in the *halachic* formulation, “within the furrow of the law” (*lifnim mishurat ha’din*).<sup>16</sup> *Chesed* is anchored in law but goes further than law. For example, when the letter of the law would grant a litigant certain rights, but he forgoes those rights as an act of pure generosity, or, when charity requires a monetary gift of 10 percent and the donor gives 20 percent, that is *chesed*.

While the *Book of Ruth* does not establish or prescribe the obligation of *chesed*,<sup>17</sup> it does serve as the preeminent demonstration of *chesed*. It is *chesed* that Boaz shows Ruth when she gleanes in the fields, and then, most dramatically, by marrying her in order to end her widowhood and preserve the name of her deceased husband. It is the *chesed* of the community in its acceptance of Ruth, the Moabitess, that provides the central resolution of the narrative’s inherent tensions. And, of course, it is *chesed* that Ruth displays toward Naomi in not parting from her but in sticking with her.<sup>18</sup>

This latter manifestation of *chesed*—Ruth’s relationship with Naomi—and her determination to cling to her is emphasized when attention is drawn to the Hebrew locution of the verb “to cling”—*davkah*, from the root word *devek* meaning paste, glue, or adhesive.<sup>19</sup> Ruth not only stays with Naomi; she “clings” to her out of a profound loyalty and deepest love. Her attachment to Naomi leaves no space, no separation between the boundaries that divide one personality from another.<sup>20</sup> But this breakdown

15. *Genesis 18:1*, in PENTATEUCH AND HAFTORAHS, *supra* note 3, at 63.

16. Also translated as “inside the line of justice.” STEINSALTZ, *supra* note 7, at 209. There is disagreement in the sources as to whether *lifnim mishurat ha’din* means “beyond the law” or “rooted in the law.” The implication of the latter interpretation is that *chesed* is never completely unrelated to a legal obligation. *See id.*

17. In normative Judaism, the Written Law is confined to what is contained within the *Five Books of Moses*. The Oral Law, the main body of Jewish law as it exists today, consists of Talmudic debates, codifications, rabbinic responsa, decrees and commentaries which have come down through the ages as applications and adaptations of the Written Law according to changing historical and social circumstances.

18. *Ruth 1:18-19*, in MEGILLAS RUTH, *supra* note 1, at 81, 83.

19. Dr. Avivah Zornberg, Lecture at Temple Emanuel, Newton, Mass.: Law and Narrative in Megillat Rut (May 23, 2000) (transcript on file with author); *see also* Avivah Zornberg, *The Concealed Alternative*, in READING RUTH: CONTEMPORARY WOMEN RECLAIM A SACRED STORY 65-81 (Judith A. Kates & Gail Twersky Reimer eds., 1994).

20. On the concept of *d’vaykus*, see Judith A. Kates, *Women at the Center: Ruth and Shavuot*, in READING RUTH, *supra* note 19, at 187-98.

of barriers central to the Ruth narrative and captured by the memorable language of the *King James* version—"thy people *shall be* my people, and thy God my God"—is foreign to the normative legal world that we inhabit built as it is upon boundaries and definitions that separate persons, communities, nations, and belief systems.<sup>21</sup>

Accordingly, when the question is asked as to why Elimelech was punished with his own death and then the death of his two sons in Moab, when it is unclear that he ever violated a specific commandment of the Torah, the answer given is that Elimelech failed to show *chesed* to his fellow man when famine struck. As the richest and most powerful man in all of Judeah, Elimelech's flight destroyed the morale of his people. He abandoned them when he moved to the fertile fields of Moab. Or, to put it differently, Elimelech built walls and left spaces between himself and others. His conduct was opposite to the conduct of Ruth. His punishment resulted from his failure to act with *chesed* even though his omissions did not rise to the level of outright legal transgression.

But the Ruth narrative is not just about the offering of *chesed* (by Ruth to Naomi, and by Boaz to Ruth), but of Naomi's *chesed* as well. Upon their return from Moab, Naomi is greeted by the women of Bethlehem who declare: "Could this be Naomi?" To which she replies: "Do not call me Naomi . . . call me Mara [Heb. 'the bitter one'], for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. I was full when I went away but Hashem has brought me back empty."<sup>22</sup> But Naomi does not become "Mara." She remains Naomi (i.e., she who is sweet and pleasant). Not only does she give to Ruth guidance to join in a providential alliance with Boaz, but she takes on the task of nursing and then nurturing the infant Obed, the fruit of that union. The narrative is called the *Book of Ruth* but it might just as well have been called the *Book of Naomi*.

Not only Ruth's gift of *chesed* to Naomi but her acceptance of *chesed* is central to the meaning and significance of the story. Some modern writers have criticized Ruth for being too passive, for not living up to a modern model of feminist assertion.<sup>23</sup> Ruth stands in silence when Naomi is confronted by the women of Bethlehem in a moment of humiliation. But

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21. *Ruth* 1:16 (King James). One interpreter goes so far as to suggest that Ruth's *d'vaykus* with respect to Naomi is more important than Ruth's adherence to Naomi's God. See EISEMANN, *supra* note 9, at 24 n.2.
  22. *Ruth* 1:19-21, in MEGILLAS RUTH, *supra* note 1, at 83, 85.
  23. See e.g., Vanessa L. Ochs, *Reading Ruth: Where Are the Women?*, in READING RUTH, *supra* note 19, at 289-97; see also EISEMANN, *supra* note 9, at 29 (contrasting Ruth with Esther: "[Ruth] seems to be no more than a pawn, moved around by Naomi and Boaz in the accomplishment of their aspirations"). But did Ruth have any choice? As a Moabite woman, her position would have been compromised even more had she spoken out in defense of Naomi.

this view of Ruth's character fails to see that acceptance—whether of love or of law—is not a passive virtue but a very active one. The greatness of Ruth, and her linkage to the central narrative of Jewish History and Jewish Law, was not only the *chesed* which Ruth gave so unsparingly to Naomi but also the qualities she demonstrated in receiving *chesed* from those nearest to her. Ruth clings to Naomi as the Jewish People at Sinai were expected to cling to God and to His Torah which they received there. There was no space between Ruth and Naomi and no space between Ruth and Boaz just as there was no space between God and His People.

The importance of reception cannot be overemphasized. At Sinai, God gave the Torah to the Jewish People as an act of *chesed*. But it is not only the giving of Torah (*Matan Torah*), but its reception (*Kabbalat HaTorah*) which is critical. Thus, on the *Shavuoth* holiday, observant Jews stay awake during the night to study Torah (*Tikkun Leyl Shavuoth*) in order to reenact that historical moment when the Law was given and received. The point is made in the first chapter of *Pirke Avot* ["Ethics of the Fathers"]. The verse reads as follows: "Moses received the Torah on Sinai, and handed it down to Joshua; Joshua to the elders; the elders to the prophets; and the prophets handed it down to the Men of the Great Assembly."<sup>24</sup> The question is asked: why does the phrase not say: "Joshua received the Torah from Moses as Moses had received it from God?" The answer often given is that only Moses had the supreme prophetic capacity—first to receive all of Torah and then to pass on the body of the Written and Oral Law in its entirety. No other human being was capable of such a colossal achievement. For as the Torah says in its final chapter: "And there hath not risen a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face . . . ."<sup>25</sup>

Moses, after all, was not just the Great Law Giver but also the Great Adjudicator in the multitude of cases that were brought before him<sup>26</sup> until that burden became so great that he had to appoint a cadre of judges to assist him in the task.<sup>27</sup> That body of adjudicated law demonstrated that the Oral Law as well as the Law as Written was part of the Mosaic legacy. Consequently, it cannot be said that Joshua received all of Torah as it was

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24. *Avot 1:1*, in *PIRKEI ABOOTH: SAYINGS OF THE FATHERS, HEBREW TEXT, ENGLISH TRANSLATION WITH COMMENTARY* 13, 15 (Rev. Dr. Joseph H. Hertz ed., 1945). "The Ethics of the Fathers" is a Mishnaic tractate that collected the wisdom literature of some sixty rabbis and scholars extending over a period of roughly 500 years from 300 B.C.E. to 200 C.E. (A.D.).

25. *Deuteronomy 34:10*, in *PENTATEUCH AND HAFTORAHS*, *supra* note 3, at 917.

26. *Exodus 18:13*, in *PENTATEUCH AND HAFTORAHS*, *supra* note 3, at 289. ("Moses sat to judge the people . . . from the morning unto the evening.")

27. *Exodus 18:14-24*, in *PENTATEUCH AND HAFTORAHS*, *supra* note 3, at 289-90; *Deuteronomy 1:9-18*, in *PENTATEUCH AND HAFTORAHS*, *supra* note 3, at 738.

given to Moses, because Joshua was not his equal in such matters. Accordingly, Joshua could only hand down to his successors as much of Torah as he was capable of receiving.

The Law is embedded in the Biblical narrative just as *chesed* is embedded within the furrow of *halachah*. Law without Narrative would be dry legalism devoid of spiritual content.<sup>28</sup> Narrative without Law is story for the sake of story with no higher purpose. In the Jewish tradition, Law and Narrative sprang from the same root and grew in the same soil. Narrative and Law are one.<sup>29</sup>

This leads us back to Ruth and the central meaning of this story about righteous conduct. In the *Book of Ruth*, the deeds of the righteous were recorded and made part of a sacred canon to be recounted on the Festival that commemorates the Reception as well as the Giving of the Law. The record of those deeds is as much a part of the Law as the commandments of God Himself. One of the great jurists of the Sanhedrin, the central court of Jewish Law during the Biblical period, held that “[u]pon three things the world is based: upon Torah (the Law), upon Divine Service and upon acts of *chesed*.” But as the *Book of Ruth* clearly shows, *chesed* cannot be learned through mere precept or instruction. Its power rests upon personal demonstration. “[N]ot learning but doing is the chief thing” says the sage in the very first chapter of *Pirke Avot*<sup>30</sup>—an observation that lies at the core of Jewish law as well as Jewish belief.

Rabbinic legend has it that Ruth lived long enough to witness her great-great grandson, Solomon, the son of David and BatSheva, prove the wisdom of his judgments before all the world. The Bible recounts that “[The king] sat down upon his throne, and caused a seat to be set for the king’s mother; and she sat on his right hand.”<sup>31</sup> Both the *Talmud* and the *Midrash* say that the “mother” referred to here was not BatSheva, but Ruth.<sup>32</sup> Ruth was at Solomon’s side when as a mere adolescent he rendered decision—“and all . . . heard of the judgment which the king had judged”<sup>33</sup>—in the famous case of the two women litigating the parenthood of the infant child.

The *Book of Ruth* began by locating the story in a period of time

28. “[T]he Talmud says that Jerusalem was destroyed only because its inhabitants conducted their affairs according to the strict rules of the law.” STEINSALTZ, *supra* note 7, at 209.

29. Cover, *supra* note 6, at 5.

30. *Avot 1:17*, in PIRKEI ABOTH, *supra* note 24, at 25.

31. 1 Kings 2:19 (King James).

32. See, e.g., 4 LOUIS GINZBERG, THE LEGENDS OF THE JEWS 30-34 (Johns Hopkins Univ. Press 1998) (1938). Accord EISEMANN, *supra* note 9, at 51-52.

33. 1 Kings 3:28 (King James).

defined by law: “in the days when the judges judged.” Accordingly, it can be said that the *Book of Ruth* is embroidered in the largest of thematic textures: the dynamic movement of a society and a culture from a period of lawlessness—when even judges were being judged—to a time ruled by law. Ruth’s narrative ends with the image of Ruth seated next to Solomon, the noblest figure of law since the time when Moses himself sat in judgment before his people centuries before. The story of Ruth connects the two greatest themes and events recounted in the Hebrew Bible—the Exodus from Egypt and the Revelation at Sinai—Narrative and Law—Giving and Receiving—a “mountain of law” from the simplest of texts.