

# ANALYSIS OF MEGILLAT RUTH (VIII)

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## I

### BO'AZ AND RUTH...AND OVED (4:13-17)

#### OVERVIEW

The focus of the text has shifted; until now, we were at the city-gate, watching Bo'az and **P'loni Almoni** "negotiating" the redemption of Elimelekh's field. We now celebrate the anticipated marriage of Bo'az and Ruth and the denouement of their meeting - the birth of a son. In this section, the "Greek chorus" of the women of Beit-Lechem returns, blessing both Naomi and the newborn son. This blessing (in tone, content and even length) represent accurate indicators of how Naomi's fortunes have completely turned around - as a result of the many acts of Hessed performed by her and by those in her periphery.

After analyzing the verses in this penultimate section of the Megillah, we will take an overall look at this chapter. Even though the chapter, as mentioned, contains two independent scenes (the city-gate and the marriage/birth), the chapter is structured in a manner that reflects a certain correlation between the two which reflects the same literary elegance with which all students of T'nakh are familiar. In addition, this interrelationship can serve to enlighten us as to the implications of each scene.

The first half of the chapter was "guided" by the **Milah Manchah** "redemption" (**G'L**). Our scene is directed by a different, short word **Shem** ("name"). Even though it only shows up three times within these verses, there are several more occurrences of **Shem** within the chapter - all of which point to the events of this climactic scene:

1. l'Hakim Shem haMet *to restore the name of the dead to his inheritance*. (v. 5)
2. l'Hakim Shem haMet *to restore the name of the dead to his inheritance*, (v. 10)
3. v'Lo yiKaret Shem haMet *so that the name of the dead shall not be cut off from among his brothers* (v. 10)
4. uK'ra Shem b'Veit Lechem *and be famous in Beth-Lechem* (v. 11)
5. v'Yikare Sh'mo B'Yisra'el - *that his name may be famous in Yisra'el* (v. 14)
6. vaTik'rena Lo haSh'khenot Shem *And the women of the neighborhood gave him a name* (v. 17)

## 7. vaTik'rena Sh'mo Oved *and they called his name Oved* (v. 17)

As we have mentioned several times (see last week's shiur), the usual amount of times that a **Milah Manchah** will appear in a Parashah is seven; evidently, then, the word **Shem** (with its various uses - to restore a name, to be famous, to call someone by a name) is the keyword of the second half of the final chapter. We will address the significance of this word - and try to solve its most enigmatic use in v. 14 - at the end of the shiur (section IV).

### ANALYSIS

4.13. So Boaz took Ruth, and she was his wife; and when he went in to her, Hashem gave her conception, and she bore a son.

The verb used here is **LKCh**, a move away from the purely transactionally-oriented **KNH** which Bo'az used in his dialogue with **P'loni Almoni** (v. 5 - the word **uMe'et** at the beginning of 5b should be understood as **v'Gam Et**). In other words, Bo'az here has fully and completely taken Ruth as his wife.

The seemingly superfluous phrase which follows the description of Bo'az's "taking" Ruth - **vaT'hi Lo l'Ishah** - *and she was his wife* - is not uncommon in T'nakh. For instance, in a story which closely parallels ours, the marriage of Yitzhak and Rivkah, we read::

vaYikach et Rivkah vaT'hi Lo l'Ishah - *and he took Rivkah and she was his wife*. (B'resheet 24:67 - see also II Sh'mu'el 11:27)

Now that we've found several examples of this phrase, what are we to make of it? The Midrash (Lekach Tov) comments on our verse:

"A proper woman [married] to a proper man, an **Eishet Hayyil** to a **Gibbor Hayyil**".

In other words, the second phrase in our verse teaches us that this was a marriage of equals, in spite of the great chasm which divided them regarding age, background and social/financial standing. The personal greatness, nobility and valor each one exhibited demonstrated the perfection of this match - a woman of valor and a man of substance. It is the ideal nature of this pairing which the text is underscoring. This point is equally valid in regards the marriage of Yitzhak and Rivkah. (The source in II Sh'mu'el does not work as well within this explanation.)

In addition, since this phrase **vaT'hi Lo l'Ishah** is presented from Ruth's perspective (albeit in the passive voice), there is every indication of her complete willingness to marry Bo'az.

One final point on this phrase. Whereas Ruth had consistently presented herself to Bo'az as his handmaiden (2:13, 3:8), the text confirms that her status is now, explicitly and unambiguously, that of a wife.

As the Megillah draws to a close, God's direct intervention is again highlighted. It was God's "remembrance" of His people and His land that set the events of the Megillah in motion (1:6). In

similar fashion, it is God who blesses Ruth, Bo'az and Naomi (and, ultimately, His people and His land) through the birth of a son.

The mention of God's blessing in the case of conception is not new to us. We find it wherever there is a barren woman whose prayers (or those of her spouse) or whose kindnesses (or those of her spouse) invoke a miraculous (or, at least, long-awaited) birth. Note the chart: (By the way, the awaited/miraculous child is always a son. We will address this in section IV, below).

<i>Name</i>	<i>God's Intervention</i>	<i>Merit</i>	<i>Child</i>
Sarah	B'resheet 21:1	Avraham's <b>Hessed</b>	Yitzhak
Rivkah	B'resheet 25:21	Yitzhak's prayer	Ya'akov/Esav
Rachel	B'resheet 30:22	Rachel's prayer	Yoseph
Mrs. Manoach	Shof'tim 13:3	???	Shimshon
Hannah	I Sh'mu'el 1:20	Hannah's prayer	Sh'mu'el
Shunamit	II M'lakhim 4:16	her <b>Hessed</b>	a son

It would stand to reason, then, that Ruth could be considered a "barren woman". The text states that she was married to Mach'lon for ten years without bearing children - and, here, God's intervention in her conception is mentioned. This mention is uncommon in T'nakh - except in cases of barrenness. If this thesis is accurate, then the parallels between Ruth and Avraham are even greater than we suggested in earlier shiurim. Avraham's did not turn to God in prayer for a son (although he alluded to it when God promised him the Land - B'resheet 15:2); rather, it was the merit of his actions which invoked God's blessing. Similarly, we do not find Ruth praying for a son - but her constant devotion to Naomi is what leads her to Bo'az's field - and later, to his threshing-floor - and, ultimately, to his **Huppah**.

Regarding the birth of her son: We would expect a name to be given immediately in the same verse or, at the furthest, in the next verse. Instead, we are treated to blessings bestowed upon Naomi and Ruth, a description of Naomi's relationship with her "grandson" - and, only then, do we learn the child's name. In this case, the child's birth is very much the result of the relationship between Ruth and Naomi and, as such, it is proper to assess, bless and describe that relationship as it unfolds with the birth of this son before naming him.

At this point, the "job" of Ruth and Bo'az is complete and they move to side-stage. Center stage is

now occupied by Naomi (and her entourage, including the women of the town and the baby). This is another perfect *inclusio* to the Megillah, which began with Naomi and her entourage (husband and sons) as the central characters.

4.14. And the women said to Naomi, Blessed be Hashem, Who has not left you this day without a redeemer, that his name may be famous in Yisra'el!

Where are these women standing? The most obvious interpretation is that they were present at the birth of Ruth's baby and turned to Naomi with this blessing.

In the first chapter, the women of the town declared **haZot Naomi?** (*Is this Naomi?*) - to wit, can this be the same Naomi who left with the stability of family and means? Now, as the narrative moves towards its conclusion, the women "redeem" that declaration with this one. They aver that Naomi has been redeemed - as if to say, that same Naomi who was lost to us when we first re-encountered her a few months ago (upon her return), has been revived and restored through the birth of her future- a son.

Notice how both **Milot Manchot** of the chapter are woven into this blessing:

1. Asher lo Hishbeet Lakh Go'el haYom - *Who has not left you this day without a **redeemer***, and
2. v'Yikare Sh'mo b'Yisra'el - *that his **name** may be famous in Yisra'el!*

The redeemer mentioned here is, surprisingly, the baby. We see this in the next verse, as the baby is promised as the "restorer of [Naomi's] life..."

The final phrase **v'Yikare Sh'mo b'Yisra'el** is extremely awkward and seems an incomplete phrase to any student of T'nakh. Any time the verb **KR'** appears followed by the noun **Shem**, we expect a name to follow:

And she called his name - Mo'av (B'reshet 19:37)

And she called his name - Ben-Ami (ibid. 19:38)

And they called his name - Esav (ibid. 25:25)

And he called his name - Ya'akov (ibid. 25:26)...and so on

We will address this awkward phrase in section IV.

4.15. And he shall be to you a restorer of your life, and a nourisher of your old age; for your daughter-in-law, who loves you, who is better to you than seven sons, has born him.

It is Naomi, who has returned (**Shavah**) from the fields of Mo'av (4:3), who will benefit from this child as a "restorer of life" (**Meishiv Nefesh** - same root as **Shavah**).

We now see what the definition of a **Go'el** - someone who accepts the responsibility for his family's welfare. If this child will, indeed, be a source of restoration and nourishment in Naomi's advanced years, then he will have fulfilled the job of a **Go'el**.

The second phrase: **v'Hu y'Khalkel et Seivatekh**, is translated as *a nourisher of your old age*. The verb **KLKL** sometimes takes this meaning (e.g. II Sh'mu'el 19:33, I M'lakhim 18:4,13), however, in a famous passage (I M'lakhim 8:27), Sh'lomo uses it to mean "to bear":

Even the heavens to their outermost reaches cannot contain You (**Lo y'Khal'k'lukha**).

Given that reference, we may translate this blessing as *he will be bear you in your old age*.

The first half of the verse completes the picture of what this child's birth represents for Naomi. On the one hand, he is someone who will carry the name forward, preserving the legacy of Naomi's family. In addition, he will infuse Naomi's life with new meaning, turning her focus from the tragic past to an exciting future.

There is, however, one significant error in this claim - the boy is in no way related to Naomi. How can his birth signal the preservation of her legacy and new hope for her future - if he isn't her grandchild?

In order to overcome this stumbling-block, the women add a telling phrase about Ruth's relationship with Naomi:

... for your daughter-in-law, who loves you, who is better to you than seven sons, has born him...

This is, by the way, the only instance of the word **AHB** (*love*) in the Megillah. In spite of the romance between Bo'az and Ruth, the text, in the spirit of **Tz'ni'ut** (modesty) which informs their relationship, only alludes to their feelings for each other. The one "love" which is mentioned explicitly is that which catalyzed the entire story - Ruth's devotion to Naomi.

The women describe Ruth's attachment to Naomi as being stronger than that of seven sons. This evokes Elkanah's words to Hannah (in consoling her over her barrenness):

Am I not better to you than ten sons? (I Sh'mu'el 1:8)

In both cases, the intent is not an equation - as the Targum renders it here: *than many sons*. Rather, the sense is that the devotion (which is the central task of a son) of Elkanah to Hannah, and of Ruth to Naomi, is more reliable and expressed with greater intensity, than that of sons.

There is, however, a significant difference between the two statements - and our narrative may be drawing our attention to that.

In the case of Hannah, Elimelekh's words fell on deaf ears. Hannah was not consoled by his claim - true though it might be. Naomi, on the other hand, seems to completely accept this declaration of the women of Beit-Lechem.

There is a ready explanation for this difference. No matter how supportive, nourishing and committed a spouse may be, s/he is of the same generation. The spouses intended to build a future and to bring the next generation into the world. Knowing that the love of one's spouse is strong may bring a sense of comfort - but there is no consolation for the future.

In our case, however, the women only aver this love of Ruth's for Naomi after the future has been realized - through the birth of a son.

What the "Greek chorus" has accomplished in this last phrase is to overcome the lack of biological relationship between Naomi and the child. In spite of that "technical" gap, this child can be considered her grandson - since the mother is more committed to her than any amount of sons would be (and, presumably, more than her own sons were).

4.16. And Naomi took the child, and laid him in her bosom, and became his nurse.

The opening phrase here (again) brings us back to the beginning of the Megillah:

And the woman [Naomi] *was bereft of her two sons and her husband.* (1.5)

Although some have suggested that the verse implies a formal adoption on the part of Naomi, there is nothing to suggest that this is a necessary - or even desirable - step here. There would be no need for the boy to become Naomi's son (legally) in order for him to inherit the property - that has already been accomplished via Bo'az's redemption.

More than likely, the title of **Omenet** (*nurse*) given to Naomi means that she both cared for him as an infant - and that she was his mentor. Compare with II M'lakhim 10:1,5.

4.17. And the women of the neighborhood gave him a name, saying, A son has been born to Naomi; and they called his name Oved; he is the father of Yishai, the father of David.

In the three instances where the women spoke as a chorus, a different descriptive was used. In the first chapter (v. 19) the text states: *the whole city*. Earlier in our chapter (v. 14), *the women* bless Naomi, Ruth and the child. In our verse, it is *the women of the neighborhood* - **haSh'kheinot** who name the boy. Each instance is more intimate than the one previous, a change reflected in the size/scope of the group speaking.

The notion of a bystander (a non-parent) naming a child is unique in T'nakh (except for B'resheet 38:29, depending on how the verse is read). Perhaps the sense that this child "belongs" to the city of Beit-Lechem, by virtue of his association with the redemption of ancestral land there, grants them the right to name him.

What is more curious is the name itself. Even though there is a declaration associated with naming the child, there is neither an explanation given (such as that given to Yitzhak, Yishma'el, Esav, Ya'akov, and all of the children of Ya'akov - among other) nor is there even an obvious connection between his name and the events surrounding his birth. We will address this in section IV.

## SUMMARY

In this brief (5 verse) section, Bo'az marries Ruth and they immediately are blessed with a son. At that point, the emphasis of the text shifts to Naomi - who is, properly, the central character in our story. As mentioned in an earlier shiur, Ruth's name appears 12 times in the Megillah, Bo'az shows up 18 times - but Naomi (who is seemingly "backstage" much of the time) appears 21 times. She reclaims her position as central actor here, as we come to the conclusion of the Megillah.

## II

### THE STRUCTURE OF THE FINAL CHAPTER

As mentioned above, in spite of the "split" nature of this chapter, there is an interconnectedness which informs the entire chapter 4. Note that we are suggesting this before completing the entire chapter - there is good reason for that. The final five verses are not part of the narrative and are generally treated as an epilogue to the Megillah.

The chapter is arranged, as is the entire Megillah, in chiasmic fashion, as follows: (we will not quote the entire verse, just those phrases which highlight the connection)

- 4.1: **Go'el, P'loni Almoni** (no name - see section IV)
- 4.2 **Vayyikach**
- 4.3 **haShavah miS'dei Mo'av** (referring to Naomi)
- 4.4 *in the presence of those seated here...* **Im tiG'al**
- 4.5 Bo'az's stipulation - *to perpetuate the name of the dead*
- 4.6,8 A refusal to marry
- 4.7 (parenthetical) historic statement
- 4.9-10 Bo'az's declaration, bounded by **Eidim...Eidim**
- 4.11-12 A blessing with historic references
- 4.13a The marriage
- 4.13b The birth (perpetuating the name of the dead)
- 4.14 *The women stated...* **Lo Hishbeet Lakh Go'el**
- 4.15 **Meishiv Nephesh** (referring to Naomi)
- 4.16 **vaTikkach**

#### 4.17 **Oved Avi Yishai...** (names!), **...David** (the future **Go'el**!)

As we can see in this chart, many of the components of the first half of the chapter are "redeemed" in the second half. The namelessness of the **Go'el** is offset by the child's name...and his association with David, the ultimate **Go'el**. We could go through each of these, but the chart is fairly self-explanatory. It is prudent, however, to note that the fulcrum of this chiasmus is Bo'az's public declaration of his purchase of *all that belonged to Elimelekh* and his marriage to Ruth. It is Bo'az's nobility, not only in the field and on the threshing floor, but also in front of *the elders and the all of the people* that establishes his status as a **Gibbor Hayyil**, worthy of an **Eishet Hayyil**.

### III

#### THE GENERATIONS OF PERETZ (4:18-22)

##### OVERVIEW

As mentioned earlier, this section is generally viewed as an epilogue to the Megillah. There isn't much to comment here, except to note that the "chain" goes back to a curious name - Peretz. We would have expected it to go back one more generation - to Yehudah - or even back to Ya'akov. The effect, however, of going back only as far as Peretz, is to establish ten generations until David. This is a common styling of the T'nakh; e.g. the generations from Adam to Noach and from Noach to Avraham. (Note the observation of the Mishnah in Avot 5:2).

##### ANALYSIS

4.18. Now these are the generations of Peretz; Peretz fathered Hetzron,

4.19. And Hetzron fathered Ram, and Ram fathered Amminadav,

4.20. And Amminadav fathered Nach'shon, and Nach'shon fathered Salmah,

Salmah and Salmon are the same person - we often find variations on names in T'nakh.

4.21. And Salmon fathered Bo'az, and Bo'az fathered Oved,

4.22. And Obed fathered Yishai, and Yishai fathered David.

##### SUMMARY

Just as the Megillah opened up with the lineage of Elimelekh, it closes with the "endpoint" of that lineage - David. Just as the Megillah opened *in the days of the Judges*, it closes with the promise of Monarchy.

### IV



## "K'RIAT SHEM" IN MEGILLAT RUTH

As we pointed out above, the **Milah Manchah** in the last half of this chapter is **Shem**. Not only does this word play a critical role in the last two scenes of the Megillah, it is also used in a curious manner in v. 14.

Dr. Gavriel Cohen addressed this issue in an article published in *Iyyunei Mikra uFarshanut* Vol. 2 (Bar-Ilan 1986).

After rejecting several proposals as to the meaning of **v'Yikare Sh'mo b'Yisra'el**, Dr. Cohen suggests that we look back to v. 11 to understand the meaning of this phrase.

va'Aseh Hayyil b'Efratah, uK'ra Shem B'veit Lechem -

May you prosper in Ephratah, and be famous in Beth-Lechem;

Just as the translation here renders it, **K'riat Shem** may be understood as a parallel to **Aseh Hayyil** - (*may you prosper*). To have a "name" means to have a reputation, fame (or infamy - see D'varim 22:14,19) or renown.

We can now go back to v. 14 and explain as follows: **v'Yikare Sh'mo B'Yisra'el** simply means: May he be famous among the people of Yisra'el.

Now we can reevaluate the declaration of the neighbor-women (v. 17). When we first analyzed it, we pointed out that this was the only instance where a non-parent named a child in T'nakh (except where God or His agent did so). This is not necessarily the case. We may understand that

VaTikrena Lo haSh'kheinot Shem Lemor...

means that they publicized the fact that:

Yulad Ben l'Naomi (*a son has been born to Naomi*)

They then publicized his name - which was given to him (we would presume) by his parents.

This analysis helps us understand one other intriguing point in the final chapter. The anonymous **Go'el** is exactly that - nameless. Why does the text seemingly go out of its way to hide his identity?

The sense is that those who participate in the perpetuation of the family - and of K'lal Yisra'el - are those whose names live on. They live on through their children and through the children they helped bring into the world. **P'loni Almoni** is anonymous because that is exactly where he "gets off the train". He is willing to save the property, but not to *perpetuate the name of the dead*.

Now that we've completed our study of Megillat Ruth (and will return to "regular" Parsahat haShavua study next week - although Ruth promises to make an appearance again in the next shiur!), I'd like to give credit where credit is due. Many of the insights shared in these pages were gleaned from Yair Zakovich's commentary on Ruth in the Mikra l'Yisra'el series, along with Meltzer's commentary in the

Da'at Mikra series.

Much thanks goes to Rav Elhanan Samet of Machon Herzog whose lectures on Megillat Ruth inspired me to tackle this project - and whose approach informed much that has been shared here.

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