

The Politics of Rewriting Bible Stories

Who Gave the Order?

The question is as old as it is politically embarrassing, and it is always asked by those who want to find the reasons and the men responsible for a military defeat or an intelligence failure. So it was in the aftermath of the case involving the 12 spies sent by Moses to explore the land of Canaan.

The *Book of Numbers* states that God personally ordered Moses to send the spies, but the mission of these men — who were identified by name, rank, family, and tribal connections — turned out to be a traumatic failure (Numbers 13-14). That's what usually happens when God is thought to be the head of the Israeli secret service, or worse, when the head of the Israeli secret service thinks he is God. The *Book of Deuteronomy*, however, written many years later, shifts responsibility for the fiasco. It hastens to state on its first page that the children of Israel themselves asked Moses to send the spies (Deuteronomy 1:22-29). God and his prophet come out clean.

It is not my purpose to dwell on the ethical issues which arise when Biblical authors, as in the classic case of the 12 spies, rewrite history to serve a political end. My purpose, rather, is to assess their technical performance in the light of four questions. How was the rewriting done? What object in view was to be served? Was the object attained in a skillful and efficient way? To what extent can evidence of the rewriting process be detected in our own day? I will draw mainly on

two texts — the *Book of Chronicles* and the *Book of Ruth* — to show how these questions must be answered in fundamentally different ways.

The *Book of Chronicles*: The Worst Cases

Most of the many examples of the rewriting process in the Bible are found in the *Book of Chronicles*, and the reason is this: As the last book in the Bible, it provided authors with a final chance to correct, to disguise, and to smooth over inconvenient and prickly facts. *Chronicles*, however, is no “how to do it” model of excellence for rewriting. In fact, it contains the worst examples of the process.

Chronicles was written during “Shovav Zion” — the return to Zion from the Babylonian exile in the sixth century B. C. Two purposes of statecraft were to be served by the text. They were first to revive and promote the memory of the House of David and of the Temple of Jerusalem that had been destroyed at the time of the Exile; and second, to help reroot the Children of Israel in their homeland. These were major tasks, but unfortunately the talents of the authors of *Chronicles* were not equal to their complexity. They simply rewrote Biblical history as though certain persons never lived, or certain events never happened, and they whitewashed the stains of persons and events. Worse, the authors were so lacking in aesthetic finesse — were so inept in concealing what they erased, rewrote, snipped, pasted, and painted over — that the aggregate effect amounted to a case of labor lost.

Rewriting the Royal House of David

The earlier *Book of Samuel* dealt in detail with the difficult period of David’s life before his kingship — when the fastest slingshot in the east was an outlaw, the head of a gang of violent merry men, pursued by the authorities. In the *Book of Chronicles*, however, David’s deeply ambiguous acts as an

outlaw — and much else about his life during this period — were conveniently ignored by an editor working for a more dignified image of the king.

The *Book of Samuel*, among other things, told the juicy story of how David, while still an outlaw, became involved with his second wife, Abigail (I Samuel 25: 3-42). "She was a woman of good understanding and of beautiful countenance" — both intelligent and good-looking — the only woman in the Bible who was accorded that double accolade. The *Book of Samuel* did not hesitate to say that this outstanding lady was formerly married to Nabal the Carmelite. In fact, it adds an account of how David first met her.

David had tried to extract protection money from her husband, claiming that he guarded Nabal's 3,000 sheep and 1,000 goats in the desert. Nabal stupidly rejected an offer he should not have refused. David, fully armed, prepared to take his revenge, but Abigail stepped in and persuaded David not to kill her husband. She agreed that Nabal deserved to be killed: he was "churlish and evil in his doings." But she went on to argue convincingly that the stain of murder could ruin David's future political career. To David, this was an important lesson in politics. Politicians should not bloody their own hands. Let others do it for him.

Nabal in fact died soon afterward under mysterious circumstances. The Biblical postmortem tried to ascribe Nabal's death to a heart attack: "His heart died within him." But a prior general paralysis — "He became as a stone" — followed shortly by death, would lead a modern pathologist to suspect what an autopsy most likely would confirm: the deceased had been poisoned. Anyway, Abigail, the beautiful and clever widow hastily married David and soon after, a son was born to the couple. His name was Chileab (II Samuel 3: 3).

Confronted by these disturbing details, the editor of *Chronicles* reached for a blue pencil. The extortion story out? Not

a syllable was left of it. What about the person the *Book of Samuel* identified as "Abigail wife of Nabal the Carmelite." There was no mention of Nabal, nor of the fact that Abigail was previously married, nor how the marriage to her first husband ended.

There was another interesting aspect to the whole of the matter. The Chronicles account changed the name of Chileab — David and Abigail's son — to "Daniel." The mysterious transformation intrigued later commentators on the Bible. One among them suggested that the unusual name Chileab was derived from the phrase "hybrid father" which in Hebrew sounded like Chileab. The same commentator added that some people addicted to gossip claimed that Abigail married David when she was already pregnant from Nabal. If so, then the editor of Chronicles apparently decided to quiet the gossip by dispensing with the suspicious name "Chileab": and substituting in its place the name of "Daniel" with its solid ring.

The worst stain on David's image was, beyond a doubt, his crime against Uriah, the Hittite, all because of his wife Bathsheba, the bathing beauty. The author of the *Book of Samuel* dealt with the scandalous affair of adultery and murder in a straightforward professional way. The author knew there was no "deniability" in the facts of the case. It was pointless even to attempt a cover-up. So a plea of guilty was filed in the court of history. At the same time, David's repentance, his expressions of remorse, and the punishment he suffered were also recited at length and in detail.

The same story in Chronicles, however, was subject to the treatment the Soviet press used to give to all disasters in Russia. By not reporting the disasters, they didn't happen. So, too, with the triangular relationship between David, Bathsheba, and Uriah. Chronicles made no mention of it. History itself, however, showed that the clumsy efforts at censorship in Chronicles were not necessary. Jews knew that David committed many sins, but the pious king remained a

beloved personality, and Jews have prayed to this day for the return of David.

The Same Continued

The editors of *Chronicles*, who whitewashed David, hung on to the same brush and applied it to Solomon, the child of David and Bathsheba. Take, for example, King Solomon's interesting foreign policy whereby he came to seven hundred wives and had three hundred mistresses. These were next door princesses. While the figures suggest that Solomon had many fruitful talks with foreign leaders, Jewish royal ethics looked down on the consequences of such talks. So, King Solomon's excessive married life was never mentioned in the *Book of Chronicles*. Nor was any notice taken of the fact that his wives lured him into the worship of idols.

Sometimes *Chronicles* simply reversed the facts of an earlier story, as it did in the following instance. The *Book of Kings*, in describing King Solomon's business with King Hiram of Tyre, said "Hiram the King of Tyre had furnished Solomon with cedar trees, fir trees, and with gold. . . . King Solomon gave Hiram 20 cities in the land of Galilee" (I Kings 9: 11). However, giving away pieces of the promised land to neighboring countries was not an acceptable practice, even though when Hiram came to visit "the cities which Solomon had given him, they pleased him not." *Chronicles*, faced by the need to correct the poor impression Solomon's transaction might have created, resorted to a stunning revelation. It was Hiram who gave the 20 cities to Solomon, in addition to the timber (II *Chronicles* 8: 2). The very interesting deal showed that King Solomon was much wiser than anyone thought.

Up the Priests, Down the Prophets

As noted, the *Book of Chronicles* among other things, set out to enhance the image of the religious establishment —

the priests and Levites and the tasks they performed in the Temple. The great prophets, as we know, were very critical of Temple worship. They even accused the priests of leading believers away from the true values of Judaism. But the *Book of Chronicles*, to enhance the status of the priesthood, minimized the prophet's role and degraded prophecy itself.

The three Biblical accounts of the Assyrian siege of Jerusalem reveal much about the manner of the matter in question. The story of the siege is retold in the *Book of Kings*, the *Book of Isaiah* and the *Book of Chronicles*. Each is a rewriting of a basic fact confirmed in Assyrian documents — namely, that Jerusalem was not conquered.

The *Book of Kings* reports that during the reign of Hezekiah in Jerusalem most of Judea was conquered by the Assyrian King Sennacherib. Hezekiah, hoping to convince Sennacherib to leave the country, turned all the Temple treasures over to him. It was no sale. The mighty Assyrian king laid siege to Jerusalem, demanded the city's surrender, and planned to exile its inhabitants. The reaction by Hezekiah's government and the religious establishment was one of total collapse. The ministers, the priests, and the king himself, tore their clothes in front of the people and donned sackcloth (II Kings 19: 1-2).

In desperation, Hezekiah sent a delegation to the prophet Isaiah. Considering the dreadful nature of their relationship with him, their mission must have been uncomfortable. The prophet after all, had called them "rulers of Sodom," robbers and thieves greedy for gifts.

But now, Isaiah, in response to the delegation, uttered one of his most memorable prophecies, addressing the Assyrian king with verse remembered to this day: "The virgin the daughter of Zion hath despised thee, and laughed thee to scorn/the daughter of Jerusalem hath shaken her head at thee/Whom hast thou reproached and blasphemed/and

against whom hast thou exalted thy voice and lifted up thine eyes on high?/even against the Holy One of Israel!" (II Kings 19: 21-22). Isaiah announced that Schnacherib would lift the siege, return to his own land, and die there.

That very night, an angel of the Lord struck down 185,000 Assyrian soldiers. Schnacherib returned to Nineveh, where he was murdered by his own sons.

Isaiah, then, was the true hero of the victory. He delivered a brave prophecy that was not only eloquent, but most successful from a professional point of view. Unlike some of his other prophecies, which used vague, careful terms such as "the end of days" or "a time is coming," this prediction came true within 24 hours.

The confidence of Isaiah contrasted strikingly with the panic of the king, ministers, and priests. That is the version of the *Book of Kings*, and the *Book of Isaiah*.

Now we come to the story as told in the *Book of Chronicles* many years later. First, Chronicles deleted the unhappy fact that Hezekiah turned over the Temple treasures to Assyria. Next it shows a king with qualities of leadership. This is a king who stayed calm even when the superpower of the day was closing in on his capital, a king who didn't fall to pieces. On the contrary — Hezekiah rebuilt the city wall, raising towers on it. Then, gathering his people, he rallied them, saying: "Be strong and courageous, be not afraid nor dismayed for the king of Assyria . . . with him is an arm of flesh, but with us is the Lord our God, to help us and to fight our battles" (II Chronicles 32: 3-8). The renovated Hezekiah described in Chronicles, then, is a decisive, capable, and brave king, and one who puts his faith in God. As the Assyrian army surrounded Jerusalem, the ministers didn't tear their clothes, the priest didn't wear sackcloth, and the king neither panicked nor hurried to the prophet. Credit for enlisting God to the Israeli army was no longer Isaiah's alone: "And for this cause Hezekiah the king and the

prophet Isaiah the son of Amoz prayed and cried to heaven" (II Chronicles 32: 20).

Chronicles, the last book in the Bible, along with the *Book of Ezra the Scribe*, the third to the last, constitute a worrisome ending to the Bible. Neither one is interested in the ethics and normative values of Judaism. Rather, Chronicles promotes the role of the priest as mediator between the believers and his God — a mediator who charged a healthy fee for his services. It is the book of the Temple and the palace, two systems joined in an unholy alliance.

It is likely as traditional commentators suggest, that the *Book of Chronicles* was actually the work of Ezra the Scribe. It is likely because Ezra, acting in the spirit of today's Israeli orthodox rabbinate, reflected the same approach that is encountered in Chronicles. Both focus on rituals, detailed genealogical lists, pedigrees of family trees, and both give voice to deplorable attitudes toward non-Jews. Ezra, in fact, epitomized the spirit of the unholy alliance between the Temple and the palace — because he got his power not from his own spiritual attributes, but from the king of Persia. When you enjoy the support of the palace, you can afford the luxury of censorship.

There is reason to be concerned. Most of this is also the present-day hallmark of Israeli orthodoxy. It is a religious establishment, supported by secular political systems, which chooses to forget the moral and spiritual progress made under the influence of the prophets. It is an establishment which compiles blacklists of those forbidden to marry, as in the instance of the heroine of the second book I now want to discuss: Ruth the Moabite.

The Politics of the *Book of Ruth*

The *Book of Ruth* is a different example of rewriting history. It is a wise and attractive book — executed in an ap-

peeling literary style, far removed from the cut and paste of the censor.

The story of Ruth is not usually viewed as being political in nature, and that is proof of the writer's success. The book's seams, like those of a well-tailored suit, are invisible. The rewriting is elegant, intelligent, and in retrospect, highly effective. But there is a question to be asked. What does an innocent, pastoral love story have to do with a political act like rewriting history? This question leads to another. What is the story of Ruth and Boaz doing in the Bible in the first place? As we know, some books fought for that privilege, and not all of them succeeded. Romantic stories were not included in the Bible in order to increase circulation.

The answer is found in the concluding verses of the *Book of Ruth*, which reveal that the Moabite woman was King David's great-grandmother. But why were Ruth and Boaz chosen among all David's ancestors? Why didn't the Bible tell us about the first kiss of David's father Jesse and his wife, whose name is never even mentioned?

I have an idea. The story of Ruth solved an unpleasant political problem. It was no secret that a certain percentage of Moabite blood was flowing through David's veins. A hint appears in the *Book of Samuel*: when David was running away from Saul, he hid his parents in Moab. Why especially in Moab? Because the Moabites were family.

The Israelites despised the Moabites and their brothers the Ammonites. This attitude appears as early as the *Book of Genesis*, in the obscene story of these peoples' origins. They were born to the daughters of Lot after coupling with their drunken father in a cave. The Bible forbade the Israelites to marry these lowly people. David's Moabite genes were an inconvenient fact for the royal historian. The *Book of Ruth* was written in order to remedy this embarrassment, and it was done with great subtlety. Today we might call it "image building." Ruth is indeed a Moabite, but she is characterized

in a manner that can only arouse the reader's sympathy and admiration. My guess is that this political material, disguised as an innocent folkloristic love story, was the work of an ingenious writer and no mere palace spokesman. The result is a beautiful and sensitive short story, and a rare example of humor in a very serious Bible.

"Now it came to pass in the days when the judges ruled," begins the opening verse. This tells us, then, that the *Book of Ruth* was written long after it had actually happened. Some scholars assume it was written, like the *Book of Chronicles*, at the time of the Return to Zion from Babylonian exile — a time when intermarriages were very common, and non-Jewish wives presented an urgent problem. It may have been feared that David's mixed ancestry would give intermarriage a good name.

"There was a famine in the land; and a certain man of Bethlehem in Judah, went to sojourn in the country of Moab. He and his wife and his two sons." This is nothing new. Because of their country's difficult economic situation, an Israeli family emigrated, hoping for a Moabite green card.

"And Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died, and she was left, and her two sons. And they took them wives of the women of Moab. The name of the one was Orpah, and the name of the other Ruth." Ruth, then, is a Moabite — there is no denying it.

Then the two sons also died. This is no surprise to the Hebrew reader, since their names — Mahlon and Chilion — mean sickness and death. Naomi decided to return home, to Bethlehem. The two young widows, her daughters-in-law, wanted to join her. Naomi tried to convince them to remain in Moab and find themselves new husbands, but both wept and refused. This aroused a bit of suspicion: why should the two young Moabites be so eager to go with Naomi? It's not simple to leave one's homeland and family, and emigrate to a strange country — and such devotion to a mother-in-law is rare to this day.

Not only is the reader suspicious. Naomi herself assumes that her daughters-in-law, concerned about their own fate, are hoping for marriage to a brother-in-law, as was then the legal right for widows. She reminded Ruth and Orpah that, as an old woman, she could not provide any more sons for them to marry.

Orpah then took Naomi's warning and returned to her family, but Ruth "clave unto her." And so the author starts to build her positive image. We already admire this young woman who is prompted not by egoistic or material motives, but by her love and devotion to Naomi — and not only to Naomi. At this point Ruth utters some of the most beautiful verses of the Bible, words that move us to this day:

"Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God. Where thou diest, I will die, and there will I be buried; and the Lord do so to me and more also if ought but death part thee and me."

We begin to sense that Ruth, even though a Moabite, is a very special woman. She is capable of deep love and devotion. Her loyalty is to Israel and its God. The reader already feels great sympathy for her, with no idea — and this is crucial — of the important place she will take in Jewish history. Her link to David, the story's key, does not yet appear.

Ruth and Naomi made their melancholy way across the Dead Sea and up the bare rocky hills of the Judean desert. They reached Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest. It was spring, a lovely and optimistic season. But the two widows — with no man to support them — had to feed themselves by the means the humane and merciful Biblical law allowed them: by gathering the sheaves that fell to the ground at harvest time. "And she (Ruth) went and came and gleaned in a field after the reapers, and her hap was light on a part of the field belonging unto Boaz, who was of the kindred of Elimelech."

We know, of course, this was not just luck. There are no accidents in the Bible. The Lord Himself, in his mysterious ways, had squeezed Ruth into His busy schedule and directed her toward the field of Boaz. Boaz's kinship to Elimelech, Naomi's late husband, is not just an incidental biographical detail. As a relative, Boaz is a likely candidate for marriage to Ruth.

Boaz came to the field and looked around him, and the first question he asked his foreman was not "How's harvest going?" but "Whose damsel is this?" And as we know that Ruth attracted Boaz on first sight, something about her appearance stirred his heart.

Boaz approached Ruth, welcomed her with great gallantry, and offered her food, drink, and his protection: "Have I not charged the young men that they shall not touch thee?" — a small indication of sexual harassment apparently common already in Biblical times.

Ruth's response — "Why have I found grace in thine eyes . . . seeing I am a stranger?" — once again emphasizes her non-Jewishness. We begin to sense a literary strategy — the author not only acknowledged Ruth's origin, he continued to remind us of it.

"Thou hast comforted me . . . and spoken friendly unto thine handmaid, though I be not like one of thine handmaidens," replied Ruth. She thus lets Boaz know that despite her situation he was not to consider her a slave.

From this scene in the field we gain a few more gentle strokes to the positive picture of Ruth. We already know her as good-hearted, devoted and brave, and now we know — attractive and self-respecting as well. The young Moabite is wending her way into the heart of the reader. An image is being built.

Note that the author did not judge Ruth, he did not even describe her. He enabled us to know her through her dia-

logues. Elsewhere in the Bible, the authors frequently express an opinion of the persona: Nabal was a hard man and an evildoer; his wife Abigail was intelligent and beautiful; Noah was a just man; Jacob was a plain man. In the *Book of Ruth*, however, the characters' words and deeds speak for themselves. This is not only a literary technique: when the reader is given the chance to form his own opinion of a character, he won't suspect that propaganda is in the making.

That evening, Ruth returned to her mother-in-law and told her: "The man's name with whom I wrought today is Boaz." Wise old Naomi immediately grasped the practical significance of this meeting: "Blessed be he of the Lord. . . . The man is near of kin unto us, one of our next kinsmen," she said, informing Ruth that Boaz is husband material.

But the Bible did not want to present Ruth as a husband-hunter, and so she responded with a distinct innocence. Naomi, hoping that nature will take its course, told her to keep going to the field of Boaz, and not to "any other field."

Ruth remained in the field of Boaz until both the barley and the wheat were harvested — that is, several weeks. But, despite their daily meetings, the chapter ended on a disappointing note: "She dwelt with her mother-in-law." The harvest was over, the chapter was over, and Ruth went back home. No romance. No wedding. No happy ending.

Chapter three opened with a full-scale campaign on Naomi's part. We must understand the situation of the two widows. With the end of the harvest came the end of their source of food, and any further chance of Ruth and Boaz meeting. Bethlehem of 3,000 years ago wasn't exactly Harvard Square. Ruth and Boaz couldn't simply get together over a cup of coffee. And so, this chapter belonged to Naomi. She was the power behind the scenes, the directing mind and hand. God had already acted as the matchmaker in the preceding chapter, and God, as we know, doesn't always give love a second chance.

This chapter, in which Ruth and Boaz were finally united, is funny and touching. Ruth and Boaz are adults, but shy ones, and Naomi handled them like a skilled puppeteer. First she set the scene. "Boaz of our kindred," she says, "he winnoweth barley tonight in the threshing floor."

Like the American hayloft, the threshing floor in Israel was a traditional trysting site. But we may ask ourselves why did Ruth use the seductive way, instead of simply demanding that Boaz marry her as the next of kin? The answer was simple. Naomi had described Boaz as "one of our next kinsmen" — there was, in fact, a closer kinsman who legally preceded Boaz in the obligation to marry Ruth. If Ruth and Naomi preferred Boaz, they had to fire in him the desire to win Ruth for himself. They hoped the night on the threshing floor would do just that.

There are some women, very few indeed, who can create such motivation in a man's heart in a single night.

That night was their last chance, and Naomi was not about to lose it. She instructed Ruth as she would a young girl, reminding her of the basics of dating: "Wash thyself therefore and anoint thee, and put thy raiment upon thee, and get thee down to the floor."

Naomi sent Ruth off to the threshing floor with further advice: "But make not thyself known unto the man until he shall have done eating and drinking." For Naomi knew that a man who is tired and hungry after a hard day's work can be a little edgy until after he's had his supper.

"When he lieth down . . . mark the place where he shall lie," she continued. She knew it would be difficult to find Boaz later in the dark. Imagine Ruth crawling over the heaps of grain in the dark, groping for Boaz, or even worse, stumbling upon him! Lovers can look ridiculous enough without that.

Naomi's final advice was the most clever of all: "Go in and uncover his feet and lay thee down." What a plan! Boaz is

asleep on the threshing floor in the open air of the Judean Hills, where a cool wind begins to blow around midnight. Ruth would not have to wake him, and he would find a beautiful, desirable woman lying beside him. From then on, hoped Naomi, events would follow naturally: "He will tell thee what thou shalt do," Naomi said. If he didn't know what to do at that point, he was a lost cause and Ruth might as well go home. The reader, enjoying the scene, is hardly aware of its true purpose. Naomi's detailed advice highlights Ruth's modesty and innocence.

Ruth followed Naomi's instructions faithfully, and Boaz indeed awakened in the dark of night and "Behold! a woman lay at his feet." Startled, he asks: "Who art thou?"

The second person pronoun in English does not distinguish between masculine and feminine, but the Hebrew indicates that Boaz addressed Ruth in the feminine — *Mi at?* It was too dark for him to recognize her, but she seems to have been close enough for him to feel it was a woman.

Biblical commentators have also contributed to the atmosphere of that fateful night. From the moment Ruth set foot in the threshing floor, orthodox interpreters were in a state of defensive alert. They made every effort to convince us that there was no hanky-panky. The commentator, known by acronym as Rashi, tried to persuade us that Boaz was sitting on the threshing floor studying the Torah (Rashi's garbled knowledge of ancient agriculture is manifested also in the story of David and Abigail I have mentioned before. He explained the extortion attempt, which happened during the shearing festival, as if David asked Nabal for Rosh Hashana gifts. Unfortunately, Rashi forgot that shearing sheep on Rosh Hashana (a holiday which occurs in the fall) would give them a very bad cold on Hanukkah.

Ibn Ezra, another learned source, claimed that Boaz identified his guest as a female when he saw a beardless form in the

moonlight. The puritan commentators engaged in these convolutions because both knew that Ruth and Boaz were the progenitors of King David. That's why they cared so much about appearances. They failed to realize that the author intentionally kept the David connection up his sleeve until the very end of the story. The commentators didn't understand that the reader so far didn't know that David was involved. In missing the tale's intent entirely, they rewrote history that had already been rewritten.

Boaz and Ruth maintained a decent propriety even on the threshing room floor. Their love story continued as one of two responsible adults and not two teenagers rolling in the hay. Ruth's answer to Boaz's question, "Who are you?" again shows her virtues. "I am Ruth thine handmaid," she replied. "Spread therefore the skirt over thine handmaid, for thou art a near kinsmen." That is, you're dead right about why I came here, but I'm not looking for one night of pleasure. She thus let Boaz know that she was interested in a serious obligation.

A lesser man might have enjoyed the night, only to renege in the morning, "It was great, sweetheart, but as to marriage — too bad, there's a small legal problem." But Boaz told Ruth the truth:

"There is a kinsman nearer than me. . . . If he will perform unto thee the part of a kinsman, well, let him do the kinsman's part. But if he will not do the part of kinsman to thee, then will I do the part of a kinsman to thee, as the Lord liveth! Lie down until the morning."

Ruth gambled. She stayed with Boaz until morning. The Bible offered us no details. But when she returned home at dawn, she told Naomi about "all the man had done to her." Her wise mother-in-law replied, "sit still, my daughter. . . . For the man will not be in rest until he have finished the thing this day." The bottom line is; the bird is in the trap, and he will do his best to stay there.

And so we reach the happy ending. Boaz and Ruth marry, and the people of Bethlehem come to congratulate Boaz on his wedding: "The Lord make the woman that is come into thine house like Rachel and like Leah, which two did built the House of Israel!" So esteemed was the Moabite woman that she was compared to the Mothers of Israel.

The people of Bethlehem offered Boaz another wish, which really helped to wash away the stain of Ruth's Moabiteness: "And let thy house be like the house of Perez, whom Tamar bore unto Judah." This verse needs a closer look. It sends us back to the story of Tamar, in the *Book of Genesis*. Tamar was also a widow who had to act boldly in order to find herself a new husband. But Tamar, in striking contrast to the modest Ruth, disguised herself as a prostitute and seduced her father-in-law, Judah. This non kosher union produced the whole tribe of Judah. The author thus paralleled two women in similar situations, casting Ruth's modesty and integrity against Tamar's vulgarity. The author was saying, in fact: if anyone has any complaints about Boaz marrying a Moabite, remember how his whole tribe originated! Thus the final stroke is added to the beautiful image of Ruth the Moabite.

God blessed the union of Boaz and Ruth with a son. Now comes the big surprise: "They called his name Obed, he is the father of Jesse, the father of David."

The reader finally understands what's been happening. The author has been leading him by the nose all along. This charming love story of an exceptional woman has its purpose. Here the author tells the surprised reader: "You like the story? You liked that wonderful *shiksa* from Moab? So now you know that it is this woman who is the cause of all the gossip about King David not being completely Jewish." She is indeed a Moabite, but what an outstanding woman — such devotion, such love, such beauty and virtue! There is nothing to be ashamed of — on the contrary, the Jewish People are honored to have such a woman join its ranks.

Luckily, all that had happened long before Chronicles. Ezra and his present-day successors would not have accepted Ruth's conversion as Kosher. AQ