



Introduction

These Bible studies were one of a series written by a group of biblical scholars that met 16 times via Skype in 2014 and 2015. These studies on Ruth were specifically written with ACC-16 (Lusaka 2016) in mind. However, they were also written as part of the Bible in the Life of the Church [BILC] initiative to encourage us, as the Anglican Communion, to read the Bible together across the different contexts in which we are called to witness and minister. We are delighted that, as part of these studies we are able to incorporate into the explorations the woodcuts that Margaret Parker created for “Who Are You My Daughter? - Reading Ruth Through Image and Text” on which she collaborated with Ellen Davis.

Characteristics of our Style of Engagement

The group that created these studies did so by initially undertaking the studies themselves. So, every 3-4 weeks, we ‘met’ via Skype to undertake Bible study together. Two of the group wrote each study and together we engaged with each portion of the Scriptures. As these group ‘meetings’ went on a distinctive style of engagement began to emerge. We offer this style as a way of engaging, not just with Ruth, but as a model for exploring any part of Scripture. We identified 8 characteristics of the way we engaged with Scripture:

1. Slowing down the process of engagement – there 8 Bible studies on Ruth.
2. Focusing on a whole book or a substantial unit of text.
3. Focusing on the details of the text (e.g. specific words used).
4. Exploring the texts via open-ended questions.
5. Occasionally supplementing questions with a few brief informational notes (a maximum of 1-2 notes per session).
6. For Ruth, offering a “visual text” in 20 woodcuts – this may be equally possible for other sections of Scripture
7. Reading with close attention to contemporary contexts, in their social and material specificity.
8. As the group responsible for writing these studies: attending to the dynamics of reading across the Communion, with a willingness to stand by what we have written as well as with respectful awareness of the diverse constituencies which we ourselves represent and the even more diverse constituencies which will use the studies

Introduction for participants

These Bible studies have been designed to be participatory. Fundamental to the Bible study process is that the members of each group feel free to share their interpretations, their experiences, their contexts.

We have made the Bible studies as accessible as possible, using a series of questions in each case as the basic format of the Bible study. There are no right answers to the questions! Through the questions we invite you to engage with the biblical text and your context. Each question is designed to take you deeper into the biblical text or deeper into the engagement between the biblical text and your context.

We do encourage you to follow the format of each Bible study, allowing sufficient time for engaging with the questions and the input. If you use these Bible studies in a group setting, it will be useful to appoint someone as a facilitator, whose task it will be to enable everyone to participate and complete the Bible study within a given time period.

It is important that the facilitator for each Bible study devote some time in advance of the Bible study to read through the Bible study by way of preparation. This will enable the facilitator to have





STUDY GUIDE: Ruth

a sense of the 'shape' of each particular study and to draw other group members into the tasks of reading and praying.

The group that collaborated to create these Bible studies was:

Ellen Davis, Duke University Divinity School, North Carolina, USA
Femi Adeleya, Director of Church Partnerships, World Vision International, Ghana
Cath Duce, St Stephen, Westminster, UK
John Goldingay, School of Theology of Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California, USA
Esther Mombo, Faculty of Theology, St Paul's University, Limuru, Kenya
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Chris Wright, Langham Partnership, London, UK
Stephen Lyon, Coordinator of the BILC initiative, London, UK





8 studies on the Book of Ruth

Session 1 – Hearing the story [dramatized reading of Ruth – a dramatised version is included at the end of the study questions]

1. What did you hear from this reading that you had not heard before?
2. How does this story speak into your context – or not?

Notes





Session 2 – Seeing the story [woodcut re-telling of Ruth – Margaret Parker’s woodcuts are printed after the dramatised reading.]

1. What does using these woodcuts add to your understanding of the story?
2. What did you see from this way of looking at the story that you had not seen before?
3. Does this visualisation of Ruth speak into your context – what might you want to change?
4. If you were representing Ruth visually what might you change for your own context?

Notes





Session 3 – Ruth 1

1. The first event in the story is a famine. What associations does that have for you? What sort of pressures in your context drive people to have to get out of their country to another country?
2. How do you react to the different things that Naomi says about God in this chapter (in verses 8-9, 13, and 20-21)?
3. What do you think of Orpah's decision? Looking at verses 8-15, do you think the biblical text approves or disapproves of her decision?
4. What is the significance of Ruth's well-known words (vv. 16-17) in the context of the story? What might have led her to make her surprising decision?
5. Who are the Naomis, the Orpahs and the Ruths in your society? In what ways do the characters in this chapter speak to them and for them?

NOTE

Sometimes the Old Testament states that a famine happened because of God's judgment (e.g. Jeremiah 14:11-16). Sometimes famines "just happened", with no implication of God's judgment (e.g. Genesis 12:10 and 26:1). In the biblical text of this story, we are not given any reason why the famine happened.

Notes





Session 4 – Ruth 2

1. The word gleaning appears twelve times in this chapter. Are there forms of gleaning or equivalents to gleaning in your culture?
2. The chapter begins with Boaz as a wealthy landowner and Ruth and Naomi as widows without land (verses 1-2). How do Ruth and Boaz take initiatives and use their different strengths in this situation?
3. What kind of interactions occur between people in these positions in your culture?
4. In this chapter people speak frequently to and about Ruth. How do others see her and how does she see herself?
5. The narrator and the characters speak of chance occurrences (v. 3), of God's actions of provision and blessing (vv. 4, 12, 19, 20), and of human actions of good faith or kindness. How do these interact in the story and in our experience?

NOTE – Gleaning refers to the expectation that harvesters would not be too careful in collecting all the grain and fruit and that needy people were then free to follow the harvesters to collect what they left behind. It was an example of the injunction to care for the landless poor - 'so eat and be satisfied'

Notes





Session 5 – Ruth 3

1. What was the situation of Ruth and Naomi at the end of Chapter 2, how and why do things change at the beginning of Chapter 3?
2. Naomi gives very specific instructions to Ruth (v2-4). What do you think is going on here?
3. What might be going on in Ruth's mind in verse 5?
4. Given the sexual dimensions of how this meeting on the threshing floor is described how do you understand what Boaz says and does in response to Ruth's initiative?
5. This scene points to the complexity of relationships across ethnic, gender, economic and generational lines. How does the text speak to such relationships in your own context?

NOTES – 1. In the Old Testament, "feet" is sometimes a euphemism for genitals (e.g., Isaiah 6:2). It's thus possible that Ruth is making a sexual advance on Boaz. But readers might not be expected to draw that inference and might rather assume that "feet" means "feet."

2. In the Old Testament, if a man died and he and his wife had had no sons, his brother would be expected to offer to marry his widow so that she might then have a son who would count as the son of the man who had died and would inherit his land.

Notes





Session 6 - Ruth 4

1. Who are the characters in Chapter 4 and what is the significance of what they say and do?
2. How and by whom are the decisions made in this chapter? How does this reflect or raise possibilities about the way decisions are made in your own community?
3. What would it mean to “to perpetuate the names of the dead” (v10) in your community? Are there both appropriate and inappropriate ways of doing this?
4. Many new names (Rachel, Leah, Tamar, Perez and the ancestors of David) are introduced into the story in this chapter (v11-21). What do these names suggest about how the Book of Ruth interacts with the whole biblical story looking back to Genesis and looking forward to Christ?
5. The whole book of Ruth is a story of redemption. How do the episodes and characters in the Book of Ruth help you to think about redemption in new ways?

NOTES 1. To understand more about the significance of the named people who are introduced into the story – for Rachel and Leah look at Genesis 29-30; and for Tamar and Perez look at Genesis 38
2. A redeemer is a member of the extended family who has resources that will enable him to take action on behalf of a needy member of the family. In the case of Ruth, Elimelek's family has apparently got into debt through the famine and it has forfeited its land to its creditor. A redeemer might pay the debt and thus restore the land to the family. In Ruth, the first potential redeemer decides that he will be imperiling his own family's position if he does so

Notes





Session 7 – taking Ruth home

What will you share about your learning this week as an educator in your own community?

1. As you look back over this careful engagement, what is Ruth about – or whom?
2. What are the one or two things you would most like people in your situation to reflect up in the study of this book?
3. Are there ways of expressing this story in dance, music, or other visual arts that might capture how you currently see and hear Ruth?

Notes





Session 8 – the place of the Bible in the life of the Church

1. What is new about studying the Bible in the way we have done this week?
2. What is valuable about studying the Bible in the way we have done this week?
3. What can you do in the coming months to strengthen your community in its use of the Bible? How could that strengthen the Anglican Communion in its use of the Bible?
4. How does this study of an Old Testament book expand your understanding of the gospel as we find it in both testaments of the Bible?

Notes





A dramatized text of the Book of Ruth first used in "Who Are You My Daughter? - Reading Ruth Through Image and Text"

Ellen F. Davis, Translation and Notes

Pub: Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville ☐ London

Readers

Narrator

Naomi

Orpah

Ruth

Boaz

Harvesters

Worker-lad

Redeemer

People at the Gate and Elders

Neighbour-woman

NARRATOR

And it happened, in the days of the judges' judging, that there was a famine in the land. And a man went from Bethlehem Judah to sojourn in the fields of Moab – he, and his wife, and his two sons. And the name of the man was Elimelekh ("My-God-is-King"), and the name of his wife, Naomi ("My-pleasantness"), and the names of his two sons Mahlon ("Sickness") and Kilyon ("End-of-the-line") – Ephratites from Bethlehem Judah. And they came to the fields of Moab, and there they were. And Elimelekh died – Naomi's husband – and she was left, she and her two sons. And they took for themselves wives, Moabites. The name of the one was Orpah ("Back-of-the-neck"), and the name of the second, Ruth. And they settled there for about ten years. And the two of them also died, Malhon and Kilyon. And the woman was left without her two boys and without her husband. And she arose, she and her bride-daughters, and she turned back from the fields of Moab. For she heard in the field of Moab that YHWH had visited his people, to give them bread. And she went out from the place where she had been, and her two bride-daughters with her. And they walked on the road, to turn back to the land of Judah. And Naomi said to her two bride-daughters:

NAOMI

Go, turn back, each woman to the house of her mother. May YHWH do good-faith with you, just as you have done with the dead and with me. May YHWH grant it to you: Find rest, each woman in the house of her husband.

NARRATOR

And she kissed them. And they lifted up their voice and they wept.

ORPAH & RUTH

No, with you we will turn back to your people.





NAOMI

Turn back my daughters. Why would you go with me? Do I still have sons in my belly, who might become husbands for you? Turn back my daughters; go. For I am too old to have a husband. For if I said, "I have hope"...Even if I had a husband tonight, and even birthed sons – would you then wait until they were grown? Would you then hold back from having a husband? Don't, my daughters! For it is very bitter for me because of you. For the hand of YHWH has gone forth against me.

NARRATOR

And they lifted up their voice and wept still more. And Orpah kissed her mother-in-law. But Ruth stuck by her.

NAOMI

Look, your sister-in-law has turned back to her people and to her gods. Turn back after your sister-in-law.

RUTH

Do not press me to leave you, to turn back from (following) after you. For where you go, I will go. And where you stay-the-night, I will stay. Your people (is) my people, and your God, my God. Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. So may YHWH do to me, and may he add more to that – it is (only) death that will become between me and you.

NARRATOR

And she saw that she was determined to go with her, and she gave up speaking to her. And the two of them went on until they came to Bethlehem. And it happened, when they came to Bethlehem, that the whole city was buzzing about them. And the women said, "Is this Naomi?"

NAOMI

Don't call me Naomi ("My-pleasantness")! Call me Mara ("Bitterness"), for Shaddai has made it very bitter for me. I was full when I walked away, but YHWH has brought me back empty. Why do you call me Naomi, when YHWH has testified against me, and Shaddai has done me evil?

NARRATOR

And Naomi came back, and Ruth the Moabite, her bride-daughter, with her – the one who turned back from the fields of Moab. And they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest.

[Pause]

(Naomi has a kinsman of her husband, a man of considerable substance, from Elimelek's ancestral family, and his name is Boaz.) And Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi:

RUTH

So, I'm going to go to the field and glean among the ears, behind someone in whose eyes I find favor.

NAOMI

Go ahead, my daughter.

NARRATOR

And she went and came to the field and gleaned behind the harvesters. And by chance she happened upon the portion of the field belonging to Boaz, the one from Elimelek's ancestral family. And along came Boaz from Bethlehem! And he said to the harvesters:

BOAZ





YHWH be with you!

HARVESTERS

May YHWH bless you!

NARRATOR

And Boaz said to his worker-lad, the one who supervised the harvesters:

BOAZ

To whom does this worker-girl belong?

NARRATOR

And the worker-lad who supervised the harvesters answered and said:

WORKER-LAD

She is a Moabite worker-girl, who turned back with Naomi from the field of Moab. And she said, "Please let me glean, and I will gather among the cut ears behind the harvesters." And she came and stood from morning up till now. There has been little of sitting in the "house" for her!

NARRATOR

And Boaz said to Ruth:

BOAZ

Haven't you heard, my daughter? Don't go gleaning in another field. No, you shouldn't go anywhere else. You should stick with my worker-girls here. (Keep) your eyes on the field where they are harvesting and walk behind the women. Haven't I ordered the worker-lads not to touch you? When you get thirsty, go to the jars and drink from what the worker-lads draw.

NARRATOR

And she fell on her face and bowed to the ground.

RUTH

Why have I found favor in your eyes, that you would give me recognition – and I am nothing but a foreigner!?

BOAZ

Of course it has been told to me – everything you have done for your mother-in-law after the death of your husband, that you left behind your father and your mother and the land where you were born and went to a people you didn't know at all a day or two ago. May YHWH repay your action, and may your recompense be complete from YHWH the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take shelter.

RUTH

May I continue to find favor in your eyes, my Lord! Indeed, you have comforted me, and spoken to the heart of your servant-girl – and I am not (even) like one of your own servant-girls!

NARRATOR

And Boaz said to her at mealtime:

BOAZ

Come here and eat some of the bread, and dip your piece in the sour-wine.

NARRATOR





And she sat to one side of the harvesters, and he poured out for her roasted grain, and she ate and was satisfied and had-some-left-over. And she got up to glean. And Boaz commanded his worker-lads:

BOAZ

She may glean also among the cut-ears – and don't you harass her! And also, you should go ahead and pull some out from the bundles for her, and leave-(it)-behind, and she will glean – and don't you give her a hard time!

NARRATOR

And she gleaned in the field until evening. And she threshed what she had gleaned, and it was about an ephah of barley! And she lifted it and came to the city, and her mother-in-law saw what she had gleaned. And she brought out and gave her what she had-left-over after she was satisfied. And her mother-in-law said to her:

NAOMI

Where did you glean today? And wherever have you been working? May the one who gives you recognition be blessed!

NARRATOR

And she told her mother-in-law with whom she had been working.

RUTH

The name of the man with whom I was working today is Boaz.

NAOMI

May he be blessed by YHWH, the one who has not abandoned his good-faith with the living and with the dead!

NAOMI

The man is kin to us; he is one of our redeemers.

RUTH

He even said to me, "You should stick with the workers who work for me until they finish all the harvesting for me.

NAOMI

It's good, my daughter, that you go out with his worker-girls, and they won't press themselves on you in another field.

NARRATOR

And she stuck by Boaz's worker-girls for gleaning until completion of the barley harvest and the wheat harvest. And she settled in with her mother-in-law.

NARRATOR

And Naomi, her mother-in-law, said to her:

NAOMI

My daughter, shall I not seek for you a resting-place, one that will be good for you? And now, isn't Boaz our kinsman? – the one with whose worker-girls you have been? And look, he is winnowing (at) the barley threshing floor tonight. Now wash up, and anoint yourself, and put on your best dress, and go down to the threshing floor. Do not make yourself known to the man until he has





finished eating and drinking. And then, when he lies down and you know the spot where he is lying, you go and uncover the place-of-his-feet and lie down. And he will tell you what you should do.

RUTH

Everything that you say, I will do.

NARRATOR

And she went down to the threshing floor, and did everything as her mother-in-law had commanded her. And Boaz ate and drank, and his heart was good. And he went to lie down at the edge of the heap. And she went softly and uncovered the place-of-his-feet, and she lay down. And it happened, at midnight, that the man trembled and twisted around – and here is a woman lying at the place-of-his-feet! And he said:

BOAZ

Who are you?

RUTH

I am Ruth, your maidservant. Now spread your “wing” over your maidservant, for you are a redeemer.

BOAZ

Blessed are you to YHWH, my daughter! You have made your last act-of-good-faith better than the first, in not going after the men-in-their-prime, whether poor or rich. And now, my daughter, do not be afraid. Everything that you say, I will do for you. For all the gate-assembly of my people knows that you are a valorous woman. And now – while it is true that I am a redeemer, there is a redeemer even closer than I. Stay for the night, and in the morning, if he will redeem you – good, let him redeem. And if he does not desire to redeem you, then I myself will redeem you, as God lives! Lie down until the morning.

NARRATOR

And she lay at the place-of-his-feet until the morning, but she arose before a person can recognize his neighbor. For he thought, “Let it not be known that the woman came to the threshing floor.” And he said:

BOAZ

Hold out the shawl that you have on and grip it firmly.

NARRATOR

And she gripped it, and he measured six “barleys.” And he set it on her and he went to the city. And she went to her mother-in-law and she said:

NAOMI

Who are you, my daughter!?

NARRATOR

And she told her everything that the man had done for her.:

RUTH

These six measures of barley he gave me, for he said, “Don’t go empty to your mother-in-law.”

NAOMI





Sit down, my daughter, until you know how the matter falls out. For the man will not be quiet until he has completed the matter...today!

NARRATOR

Now Boaz went up to the gate and sat there. And here, passing by, is the redeemer of whom Boaz had spoken. And he said to him:

BOAZ

Turn aside, sit here, P'loni Almoni.

NARRATOR

And he turned aside and sat. And he took ten men from among the elders of the city and he said:

BOAZ

Sit here.

NARRATOR

And they sat. And he said to the redeemer:

BOAZ

The portion of the field that belonged to our brother, to Elimelekh – Naomi has put it up for sale...the one who returned from the field of Moab. And now I say (I will uncover your ear): Acquire, before those seated and before the elders of my people! If you are going to act-as-redeemer, then act-as-redeemer. And if you will not act-as-redeemer, then tell me, so I may know. For there is no one except you to act-as-redeemer, and I am after you.

REDEEMER

I will myself act-as-redeemer.

BOAZ

On the day of your acquiring the field from the hand of Naomi and – ahem! – Ruth the Moabite, wife of the dead, you acquire, in order to raise up the name of the dead over his ancestral property.*

REDEEMER

I cannot act-as-redeemer myself, lest I destroy my own ancestral property. So now you, redeem for yourself my right-of-redemption, for I cannot act-as-redeemer.

NARRATOR

* This translation reflects the fact that Boaz's statement is slightly ungrammatical in Hebrew, as though he were changing the direction of his sentence mid-course. This is marked in the translation by "ahem"; perhaps he pauses, clearing his throat as he approaches the delicate subject of who will "acquire" Ruth as a wife. Moreover, the ancient and medieval scribes preserved the Hebrew text in two different versions, with a difference in the key verb: "you acquire" or "I acquire." No one single English translation can capture every possibility; the statement could also be rendered in either of the following ways:
a) On the day of your acquiring the field from the hand of Naomi and – ahem! – Ruth the Moabite, wife of the dead, I acquire, in order to raise up the name of the dead over his ancestral property.
b) On the day of your acquiring the field from the hand of Naomi and from Ruth the Moabite, wife of the dead, you acquire, in order to raise up the name of the dead over his ancestral property.





Thus it was formerly in Israel concerning the right-of-redemption and concerning exchange, in order to validate any legal matter: A man removed his sandal and gave it to his fellow. And this was the manner of attestation in Israel. And the Redeemer said to Boaz:

REDEEMER

Acquire for yourself.

NARRATOR

And he removed his sandal. And Boaz said to the elders and all the people:

BOAZ

You are witnesses this day that I have acquired everything that was Elimelekh's, and everything that was Kilyon's and Mahlon's, from the hand of Naomi. And also Ruth the Moabite, the wife of Mahlon, I have acquired for my own wife, in order to raise up the name of the dead over his ancestral property, that the name of the dead may not be cut off from his kin and from the gate of his home-place. You are witnesses this day.

NARRATOR

And all the people who were at the gate and the elders said:

PEOPLE AT GATE & ELDERS

Witnesses! May YHWH grant that the woman coming into your house be like Rachel and like Leah – the two of whom built up the house of Israel. Now do valorously in Ephratah, and proclaim a name in Bethlehem! And may your house be like the house of Peretz whom Tamar bore to Judah, from the seed that YHWH gives to you, from this worker-girl!

NARRATOR

And Boaz took Ruth, and she became his wife, and he went to her, and YHWH gave her pregnancy, and she bore a son. And the women said to Naomi:

NEIGHBOR-WOMEN

Blessed is YHWH, who has not allowed a redeemer to cease for you this day! And may his name be proclaimed in Israel! And may he be to you as one who restores life and supports your gray-headed-years. For your bride-daughter who loves you has borne him – she who is better to you than seven sons!

NARRATOR

And Naomi took the child and held him to her body, and became his nursemaid. And the neighbor-women gave him a name, saying:

NEIGHBOR-WOMEN

A son is born to Naomi.

NARRATOR

And they named him Obed. He is father of Jesse, the father of David. These are the generations of Peretz: Peretz sired Hetzron. And Hetzron sired Ram, and Ram sired Ammi-nadav. And Ammi-nadav sired Nahshon, and Nahshon sired Salmah. And Salmon (Salmah) sired Boaz, and Boaz sired Obed. And Obed sired Jesse, and Jesse sired David.



A series of woodcuts illustrating the text of the Book of Ruth first used in "Who Are You My Daughter? - Reading Ruth Through Image and Text"

Margaret Adams Parker, Woodcuts

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1. A man went to sojourn [1:1]



2. The woman was left [1:5]



3. They lifted up their voice and wept [1:14]



4. Don't press me to leave you [1:16]





5. Is this Naomi? [1:19]



6. His name is Boaz [2:1]



7. I am going to glean [2:2]
[2:5]



8. To whom does this worker-girl belong?





9. You have comforted me [2:13]



10. Come here and eat [2:14]

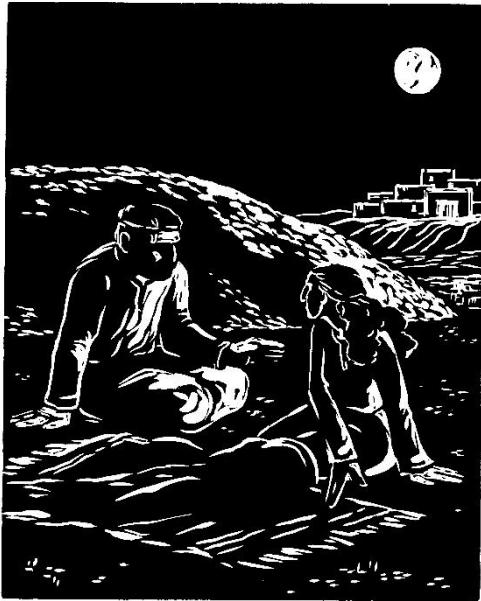


11. Her mother-in-law saw [2:18]



12. Wash up and anoint yourself [3:3]





13. Who are you? [3:9]



14. He measured six barleys [3:15]

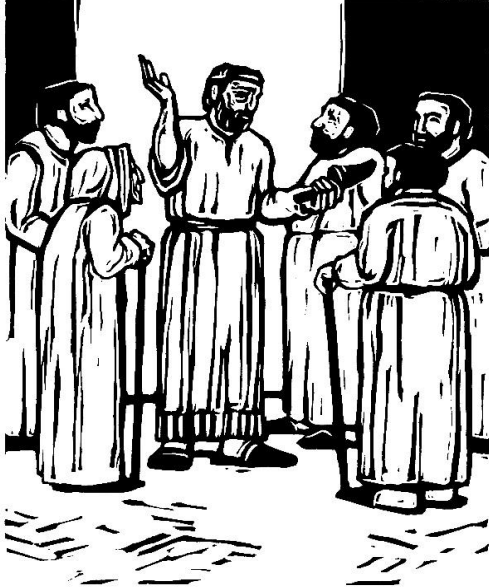


15. Who are you my daughter? [3:16]



16. He removed his sandal [4:8]





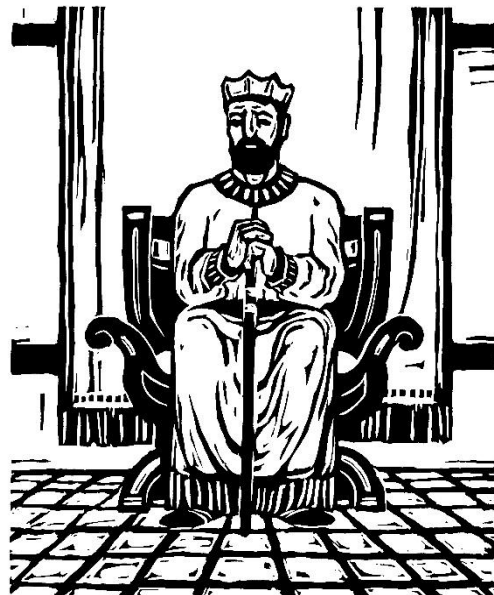
17. You are my witnesses [4:9]



18. She became his wife [4:13]



19. Naomi took the child [4:16]



20. Jesse sired David [4:22]

