

# A Note on the Book of Ruth

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The origins of the Book of Ruth have been much discussed, with some scholars seeing the book as originating from circles opposed to Ezra and/or Nehemiah. According to this interpretation, while Ezra and/or Nehemiah opposed marriages between Jews and the neighboring peoples, Ruth argued that such marriages were permissible, claiming that King David himself descended from such a marriage (Ruth 4:17).<sup>1</sup> Others have seen the book as a folktale in which is discussed the fortunes of two women who nobly withstand a serious test with YHWH's aid and protection. Intermarriage, in this view, is not the book's main concern.<sup>2</sup>

Whatever the interpretation, the acceptance of Ruth into the canon of Jewish scriptures required that some biblical passages be reinterpreted in order to accommodate the information in the book. The best known of these passages is Deuteronomy 23:4: "No Ammonite or Moabite shall be admitted into the congregation of the Lord." This prohibition now had to be understood as applying to male Ammonites and Moabites, and not to females.<sup>3</sup> This article proposes to investigate the Jewish exegesis of the story of Lot and his daughters in a similar light.

## Lot and his daughters: Genesis 19:30-38

The story of Lot and his daughters has been understood by critical scholars as a piece of anti-Moabite and anti-Ammonite polemic.<sup>4</sup> The ancient Israelites, closely related yet often hostile to both nations,<sup>5</sup> explained the origins of these peoples in highly uncomplimentary terms.<sup>6</sup>

Since Gunkel, however, scholars have emphasized that the Bible pronounces no clear judg-

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1 Cf. the Davidic genealogy in 1 Chronicles 2:4f., from which Ruth is omitted.

2 See S. R. Driver, *An Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament* (New York, 1956), 453-56; O. Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament, An Introduction*, translated from the German by P. R. Ackroyd (New York, 1965), 478-83; M. Smith, *Palestinian Parties and Politics that Shaped the Old Testament* (New York, 1971), 161.

3 See Sifre Deuteronomy, par. 249, 277 (Finkelstein). See, further, the sources cited by Finkelstein, ad loc.

4 See A. Dillman, *Genesis*, trans. W. B. Stevenson (Edinburgh, 1897), 2:112-16.

5 See Psalm 83. For examples of the secondary literature, see J. Liver, *Encyclopedia Miqrail* (1962), 4:707-22; H. Van Zyl, *The Moabites* (Leiden, 1960). On Ammon, see B. Mazar, *Encyclopedia Miqrail* (1971), 6:254-70.

6 Cf. Genesis 9:20-26 on the Canaanites.







