

Reuven Kimelman,

The Hebrew commonalities between the Books of Ruth and Esther.

1. In both cases, Esther and Ruth found favor in the eyes of their patron. Both stood out from among the women seeking the attention of their patron. Regarding Esther and Achashverosh, it says:

וַיֵּאָהֱבָה הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶת־אֶסְתֵּר מִכָּל־הַנְּשִׂימ וַתִּשְׂאֵ־תָן וַחֲסֹד לְפָנָיו (Esther 2:17)

“The king loved Esther more than all the other women, as she won his **favor** and grace.”

Regarding Ruth and Boaz, it says: מִדְּוַע מִצָּאֵתִי חָן בְּעֵינָיֶךָ לְהַפְרִינִי וְאַנְכִּי נִכְרִיָּה: וַתֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו .

She said to him, “Why have I found **favor** in your eyes to acknowledge me, seeing that I am a foreigner?” (Ruth 2:10b).

The expression in Ruth for finding favor **חָן בְּעֵינָיֶךָ** also appears in Esther 7:3, 8:5.

2. In both cases, the older relative (Mordechai and Naomi) mentors the younger relative (Esther and Ruth). Both are called guardian or caretaker. Mordechai is called Esther’s *omein* אֶת־הַדֹּסָה (2:7)

Naomi upon taking the child of Ruth is called *omenet*, לְאִמְנַת (4:16).

The only other case is Numbers 11:12 regarding Moses כַּאֲשֶׁר יִשָּׂא הָאִמּוֹן אֶת־הַיִּנּוֹק

3. In both cases, the turning point is at night. Esther says:

בַּלַּיְלָהָה הָהוּא נִדְדָה נִדְדָה שְׁנַת הַמֶּלֶךְ הַמֶּלֶךְ. (6:1). “That night, sleep deserted the king”

Ruth evokes the salvific night of the Exodus by using the identical expression of the Exodus (12:29) וַיְהִי בַחֲצֵי הַלַּיְלָה, saying:

וַיְהִי בַחֲצֵי הַלַּיְלָה וַיִּחְרַד הָאִישׁ וַיִּלְפַּת וְהִנֵּה אִשָּׁה שֹׁכֶבֶת מְרַגְלָתִי (Ruth 3:8)

“In the middle of the night, the man gave a start and jerked back— behold a woman lying at his feet!”

4. Naomi also tells Ruth to interrupt Boaz's sleep on the threshing floor and do what **he** says, וְהוּא יגיד לְךָ אֵת אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲשִׂין (3:4b).

Instead, Ruth turns the tables leading Boaz to say:

וְעַתָּה בְּתִי אֶל־תִּירָאִי כֹל אֲשֶׁר־תֹּאמְרִי אֶעֱשֶׂה־לְךָ (3:11a).

“And now, my young lady, have no fear, whatever **you** say I will do for you.”

Instead of heeding Naomi's advice of doing whatever Boaz says,

Ruth gets Boaz to agree to do whatever **she** says.

Naomi assumed that Boaz, the wealthy landowner, would call the shots, Ruth, the destitute foreigner, proved otherwise.

Note also the parallel between Boaz and Achashverosh.

The former says to Ruth: “whatever **you** say I will do for you.” (3:11a);

the latter says to Esther: וּמַה־שְּׂאֵלְתֶךָ וַיִּנָּתֶן לְךָ וּמַה־בִּקְשָׁתֶךָ עוֹד וְתַעֲשִׂי

“Whatever is **your** wish, it shall be granted. And whatever is **your** request? It shall be done” (9:12).

(5) Ruth also revises Boaz's own compliment to Ruth about God:

וְאֲשֶׁר־בָּאת לְחֹסוֹת תַּחַת־כְּנָפָיו = “that you sought refuge under His wings.” (2:12b)

into her directive to Boaz: וּפְרֹשֶׁתְךָ כְּנָפֶךָ עַל־אֲמָתֶךָ כִּי גֹאֵל אָתָּה

“spread your wing (= garment) over your handmaid, for you are the redeemer” (3:9).

6. In both cases, there is also the double intrusion of advising women.

In Esther, Zeresh speaks twice at 5:24, before the Haman-Mordecai reversal, and after at 6:13.

The first is positive about Haman's spectacular rise;

She says along with others “Let a stake be put up, fifty cubits high, and in the morning ask the king to have Mordecai impaled on it. Then you can go gaily with the king to the feast” (5:14)

the second is negative about his destined fall.

“His advisers and his wife Zeresh said to him, “If Mordecai, before whom you have begun to fall, is of Jewish stock, you will not overcome him; you will fall before him to your ruin” (6:13).

In Ruth, the local women also speak twice:

in the beginning at Naomi's return (1:19-20);

at the end at the birth of Obed (4:14).

The first evokes the negative response of Naomi's bitterness regarding the incongruity of being called Naomi

The second is their positive response to the new child

ותאמרנה הנשים אל־ננעמי בְּרוּךְ יי אֲשֶׁר לֹא הִשְׁבִּית לָהּ גֹּאֵל הַיּוֹם וַיִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל:

“And the women said to Naomi: ‘Blessed be the LORD, who has not withheld a redeemer from you today. May his name be perpetuated in Israel.’ ”

7. The book of Esther retrojects three generations backward to Kish, Mordechai’s great grandfather.

אִישׁ יְהוּדִי הָיָה בְּשׁוּשַׁן הַבְּיָרָה וּשְׁמוֹ מֶרְדֳּכָי בֶּן יָאִיר בֶּן־שִׁמְעִי בֶן־קִישׁ אִישׁ יְמִינִי:

In the capital Shushan lived a Jew by the name of Mordecai, son of Jair son of Shimei son of Kish, a Benjaminite (2:5).

The Book of Ruth projects three generations forward to David, Boaz’s great grandson.

וּבְעַז הַחֹלִיד אֶת־עוֹבֵד: וְעוֹבֵד הַחֹלִיד אֶת־יֵשׁוּי וַיֵּשִׁי הַחֹלִיד אֶת־דָּוִד:

Boaz begot Obed, Obed begot Jesse, and Jesse begot David (4:21b, 22).

8. Esther and Ruth also share the same Hebrew verb (שבר) for “looking forward.”

For Esther 9:1, it is the false hope of the enemies of the Jews looking forward to dominating them: שָׁבְרוּ אִיבֵי הַיְהוּדִים לְשִׁלוֹט בָּהֶם וְנִהְפְּוּ הוּא

For Ruth 1:13 it is the false hope of Ruth and Orpah

הֲלֵהוּ תִשְׁבְּרְנָה עַד אֲשֶׁר יִגְדְּלוּ? יְגַדְּלוּ?

9. There is the common denominator of the reversal from non-Jew to Jew. The case of Ruth (1:16) switching national and religious loyalty,

עַמִּי וְאֱלֹהֵי אֶלְהֵי = “your people are my people, and your God my God.”

is paralleled by the Book of Esther 8:17 which documents

the “conversions” to Jewishness throughout the Persian empire, saying

וְרַבִּים מֵעַמֵּי הָאָרֶץ מְתַיְהָדִים = “and many of the peoples of the land (of Persia)

professed to be Jews.”