

**Ruth and the “Worthy Woman” of Proverbs 31:10–31**  
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The term “virtuous woman” (אִשְׁת־חַיִל) appears three times in the Tanakh—in Proverbs 12:4, 31:10 and Ruth 3:11. In Codex L, the reader turns only a single page to get from the statement about the ‘virtuous woman’ (אִשְׁת־חַיִל) in Prov 31:10 to the description of Ruth on the lips of Boaz in Ruth 3:11—“all my fellow townsmen know that you are a ‘virtuous woman’ (אִשְׁת־חַיִל).” In BHS one must turn two pages. Moreover, the Hebrew word חַיִל appears together with the verb עָשָׂה in both contexts (see Prov 31:29 and Ruth 4:11). In the former instance, the husband of the “virtuous woman” describes her as follows: “Many women have done excellently (עָשׂוּ חַיִל).” In the latter instance, “all the people who are at the gate, and the elders” say of Ruth, “May Yahweh make (Ruth) who is coming into your house, like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the house of Israel. May you prosper (וְעָשָׂה חַיִל) in Ephrathah and be renown in Bethlehem” (Ruth 4:11).<sup>1</sup>

In short, the book of Ruth is closely connected with the acrostic poem at the end of the book of Proverbs. This paper attempts to show that the delightful story of Ruth is a poetic midrash on the acrostic poem in Prov 31:10–31, and that both of these texts are in essence a midrashic expansion of Prov 12:4.<sup>2</sup>

Casper Labuschagne has drawn attention to what he suggests may be another midrash of sorts on the “virtuous woman” of Proverbs and Ruth in the story of Judah and Tamar in Genesis 38.<sup>3</sup> In this instance, a woman takes measures to secure progeny for her deceased husband, but at the same time secures a forefather for King David. Labuschagne has outlined the story in a menorah pattern, as follows:

A	The birth of sons for Judah (Er, Onan and Shelah)	Genesis 38:1–5
B	Tamar not pregnant—she leaves	38:6–11
C	Tamar plays the role of a “seductress” (cf. Prov 7:10–27)	38:12–14
X	<b>Judah impregnates a “harlot”</b> (זוֹנָה, v 15)	38:15–19
C´	The search for Tamar, the “holy prostitute” (קִדְשָׁה, vv 21–22)	38:20–23
B´	Tamar is pregnant—she returns	38:24–26
A´	The birth of sons for Judah (Perez and Zerah)	38:27–30

The term קִדְשָׁה, which is often mistranslated “cult prostitute,” appears three times in Gen 38:21–22. It’s ultimate source is found in the peculiar law on “a harlot’s fee” in Deut 23:18, as I have argued in my commentary on Deuteronomy.<sup>4</sup> Tamar, Judah and Perez are explicitly mentioned in Ruth 4:12.

Like the book of Psalms, the book of Proverbs may also be outlined in five parts:

<b>Five-Part Outline of the Book of Proverbs</b>	<b>Proverbs 1–31</b>
A Wisdom discourses—personification of Lady Wisdom	1:1–9:18
B Proverbs of Solomon—original Solomonic collection [375 proverbs]	10:1–22:16
X <b>Words of the wise</b> [adaptation of “Instruction of Amenemope]	22:17–24:34
B’ Proverbs of Solomon—copied by Hezekiah’s officials [138 proverbs]	25:1–29:27
A Words of Agur and Lemuel plus the “Ode to a Virtuous Woman”	30:1–31:31

The center of this structure, which is identified as “the words of the wise” (22:17) or “the sayings of the wise” (24:23), contains “thirty sayings of admonition and knowledge” (22:20), the content of which is dependent on the “thirty chapters” of the Egyptian “Instructions of Amenemope.” Both works follow the same format, with a general introduction followed by thirty “chapters” of surprisingly similar advice on specific topics.

Writing more than fifty years ago, Patrick Skehan pointed out that the total number of proverbs in the biblical collection was announced at the outset, in coded form, within the opening verse of the book of Proverbs.<sup>5</sup> This observation grew out of the fact that there are 375 proverbs in Prov 10:1–22:16 (the original Solomonic collection) and that this is also the numerical value of Solomon’s name in the Hebrew language.

Solomon (שִׁלְמֹה) = shin / lamed / mem / he = 300 + 30 + 40 + 5 = 375

The title in the opening verse of the book of Proverbs is “Proverbs of *Solomon* son of David king of *Israel*.” The numerical value of the word *Solomon* in Hebrew is 375; and the numerical value of the word *Israel* is 541.

Israel (יִשְׂרָאֵל) = yod / sin / resh / aleph / lamed = 10 + 300 + 200 + 1 + 30 = 541

The sum of these two numbers is 916, which is the number of proverbs (or versets) in the standard critical edition of the text of the book, if 24:12 is counted as two versets, since it contains two poetic “lines.”

I have argued elsewhere that the central section of the book (Prov 22:17–24:34) is a secondary addition to the book of Proverbs.<sup>6</sup> This conclusion about an earlier “deuteronomic” collection of proverbs is based, in part, on the following observations:

Prov 1:1–9:18	256 lines (or verses in BHS = <i>Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia</i> )
Prov 10:1–22:16	375 lines (= numerical value of the name “Solomon”)
Prov 25:1–29:27	138 lines (= numerical value of the name “Hezekiah”)
Prov 30:1–31:31	64 lines (256 divided by 4)
<b>Total</b>	<b>833 lines (or verses in BHS [= 17 x 7 x 7])</b>

According to Jewish tradition, the “proverbs (of Solomon) which have come down to us are barely eight hundred in number.”<sup>7</sup> An original Solomonic collection was in use in

ancient Israel before 700 BCE, to which “officials of King Hezekiah of Judah” added other “proverbs of Solomon” (Prov 25:10).

The first canonical edition of the book of Proverbs appeared in the 17-book deuteronomic canon (ca. 500 BCE) with a collection of 833 proverbs (= 17 x 7 x 7). The canonical process was completed with the formation of the Tanakh in the time of Ezra (ca. 400 BCE), when Prov 22:17–25:34 was inserted to form the book as we now have it.

In the 17-book deuteronomic canon of the sixth century BCE, there were 119 psalms (= 17 x 7). This collection did not include Book 2 (Psalms 42–72), the so-called Elohistic Psalter, which was added later to complete the five-part (pentateuchal) collection of masoretic tradition. As I have shown elsewhere, all of the doublets noted by scholars in the book of Psalms are removed when Book 2 is removed.<sup>8</sup>

Thirty years ago, Addison Wright demonstrated that the structure of the book of Ecclesiastes is worked out mathematically in terms of the key word “vanity” (הבל), which has the numerical value of 37 and which appears 37 times in the book.<sup>9</sup>

$$\text{vanity (הבל)} = \text{he} / \text{beth} / \text{lamed} = 5 + 2 + 30 = 37$$

There are 222 verses in the book, and the number 222 = 37 x 6. In the motto as it appears in Eccl 1:2, the term “vanity” appears three times in the singular and twice in the plural within the space of eight words in the Hebrew text. Adding up the numerical value of each letter in the motto produces the number 216, the number of verses in the book without the epilogue of 12:9–14. The first word in the book, “words” (דברי) also has the numerical value of 216. Moreover, as Wright suggested, the word ויתר, which introduces each of the two paragraphs in the epilogue (12:9, 12), may be translated “six additional . . . six additional,” since the letter *waw* has the value six. It is the author’s way of indicating the addition of six additional verses; and 216 + 6 = 222 verses for the entire book. It should be noted that the numerical value of the five occurrences of the root הבל (“vanity”) in Eccl 1:2 is 185 (= 37 x 5), which corresponds to the number of verses in the inner frame, when the book is outlined in a five-part structure:

<b>Five-Part Outline of the book of Ecclesiastes</b>		<b>Ecclesiastes 1–12</b>
A	Outer frame (18 verses)	Poem on toil with double introduction 1:1–18
B	Inner frame (92 verses)	Qoheleth’s investigation of life 2:1–6:8
X	<b>Proverb (1 verse)</b>	<b>“Be satisfied with what you have”</b> 6:9
B’	Inner frame (93 verses)	Qoheleth’s conclusions 6:10–11:6
A	Outer frame (18 verses)	Poem on youth and old age with epilogue 11:7–12:14

The total number of verses in the outer frame plus the single verse in the center of this structure is 37; and the number of verses in the inner frame is 185 (= 5 x 37). The opening poem on toil (2:2–11) is framed by parallel references to the identity of Qoheleth as king in Jerusalem (1:11 and 2:12). This unit (1:1–12) in turn forms an

inclusion with the epilogue in 12:9–14 that frames the heart of the book (Eccl 1:13–12:8), which numbers 204 verses (= 17 x 12).

In short, the number 17 is of primary importance in determining the structure of Psalms, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes. The number 17 (along with the number 26) is also associated with both the Tetragrammaton יהוה and the word כבוד “glory,” as Casper Labuschagne has shown.<sup>10</sup>

The reference to the “virtuous woman” in Prov 12:4 belongs to the original Solomonic collection of proverbs. As such it constitutes the primary text on which the content of Prov 31:10–31 is built.

A “virtuous woman” (אִשְׁת־חַיִל) is the crown of her husband, אִשְׁת־חַיִל עֹטֶרֶת בַּעֲלָהּ  
 But she who brings shame is like rottenness in his bones. וְכֹרֶקֶב בַּעֲצָמוֹתָיו מִבִּישָׁה

From this particular proverb, it is easy to see why the translation “good wife” (as in RSV) has emerged as the standard translation of the Hebrew phrase אִשְׁת־חַיִל.

In the outer frame of the above outline of the book of Proverbs, the personification of Lady Wisdom is set over against the “Ode to a ‘Virtuous Woman’” in Prov 31:10–31, which may be outlined in a two-level nested menorah pattern:

<b>Poem on the “Virtuous Woman” in a Menorah Pattern</b>		<b>Prov 31:10–31</b>
A	Who can find a “virtuous woman”?	10
B	Her husband trusts her; she does him good all the days of her life	11–12
C	She makes provision for her household—with no idleness	13–19
X	<b>The “virtuous woman” (אִשְׁת־חַיִל) is a blessing to others</b>	20–26
C’	She makes provision for her household—with no idleness	27
B’	Her husband praises her: “You surpass them all”	28–29
A’	Conclusion: “Let her works praise her in the city gates”	30–31
<b>2<sup>nd</sup> Level Menorah: The “Virtuous Woman” Is a Blessing</b>		<b>Prov 31:20–26</b>
A	She shows generosity to those in need	20
B	She does not fear the future—her household are clothed in crimson	21
C	She makes herself clothing of fine linen and purple	22
X	<b>Her husband is known in the city gates among the elders</b>	23
C’	She makes linen garments and sells them	24
B’	She prepares for the future—“strength and dignity are her clothing”	25
A	She speaks wisdom and teaches kindness	26

The acrostic poem begins with the question, “A ‘virtuous woman’ אִשְׁת־חַיִל, who can find?” It continues with the statement, “she is far more precious than jewels” (31:10). The outermost frame concludes with the following verse (31:31):

Give her of the fruit of her hands;  
And let her works praise her in the (city) gates.

תנוּלָהּ מִפְרֵי יָדֶיהָ  
וַיְהַלְלוּהָ בַשְּׁעָרִים מַעֲשֵׂיהָ

These words take on deeper meaning within the context of the story of Ruth, who gleans with her hands in the fields of Boaz, and Boaz gives her “six measures of barley” (3:15) as the fruit of her labor. Boaz went up to the gate (הַעֲשָׂר) where he “redeemed” Ruth, taking her as his wife.

The second frame speaks of the husband of the “virtuous woman” (31:11–12), which also takes on deeper meaning in relation to the story of Ruth:

The heart of her husband (בַּעֲלָהּ) trusts in her / and he will have no lack of gain.  
She does him good, and not harm / all the days of her life.

This couplet is set over against another, which explores the relationship between the “virtuous woman” and her husband (31:28–29):

Her children rise up and call her blessed / her husband also, and he praises her:  
“Many women have done excellently (עָשׂוּ חַיִּל) / but you surpass them all.”

Once again, it is easy to see a connection between the words of these verses and the story of Ruth. In Ruth 4:11 we find parallel usage of the Hebrew words וַעֲשֵׂה-חַיִּל, which are usually translated “may you prosper.”

The description of the “virtuous woman,” who provides for her household with no idleness, is presented in detail in Prov 31:13–19 and 27. When Boaz inquires about Ruth, the servant in charge of the reapers describes her with these words: “Thus she came and has remained from the morning until now; she has been sitting in the house for a little while” (2:7, NASB). The more difficult reading of the Hebrew text, which is usually emended with LXX to read “without resting even for a moment,” should probably be retained, perhaps influenced by the parallel texts in Prov 31:15 and 27.

She has remained from the morning until now;  
She has been sitting in the house for a little while;  
And she does not eat the bread of idleness (Ruth 2:7).

וּתְעַמּוֹד הַבֶּקֶר וְעַד-עֵינָה  
זֹה שְׁבֹתָהּ הַבַּיִת מֵעַט  
וּלְחֶם עֲצֻלוֹת לֹא תֹאכַל

She rises also while it is still night;  
And she gives food to her household (Prov 31:15b).

וּתְקַם בְּעוֹד לַיְלָה  
וּתִתֵּן שֶׂרֶף לְבֵיתָהּ

She looks well to the ways of her household (Prov 31:27).

צוֹפִיָה הַלֵּיכוֹת בֵּיתָהּ

The reference to the household (בֵּיתָהּ) in Proverbs 31 becomes “the house” (הַבַּיִת) in the story of Ruth.

The most significant parallel between the story of Ruth and the poem on the “virtuous woman” in Prov 31:10–31 is found in the structural center of the acrostic (31:23), which concerns her husband:

Her husband is known in the (city) gates,  
 When he sits among the elders of the land (Prov 31:23).

נודע בשערים בעלה  
 בשבתו עם-זקני-ארץ

In the fourth chapter of Ruth, Boaz goes up to the (city) gate (השער) where he takes his seat with the elders (מזקני העיר) in the legal proceedings to “redeem” Ruth.

It is interesting to note the fact Boaz is introduced in the book of Ruth as a גבור חיל (Ruth 2:1), which is normally translated “man of wealth.” In 1 Sam 16:18, the same phrase is applied to David, along with the phrase “man of war,” where it clearly means “a mighty man of valor” (cf. Judg 6:12 and 11:1). There is nothing in the book of Ruth to suggest that Boaz is a military figure.

Stephen Bertman explored the concentric literary structure of the book of Ruth in 1965.<sup>11</sup> Since then, numerous scholars have carried the discussion further.<sup>12</sup> For our purposes here, the concentric design of the book may be outlined in a two-level nested menorah pattern similar to that of Prov 31:10–31:

<b><i>Ruth in a Menorah Pattern: Story of a “Virtuous Woman”</i></b>	<b><i>Ruth 1–4</i></b>
A Naomi left Bethlehem in time of famine—family tragedy in Moab	1:1–5
B Ruth goes with Naomi to Bethlehem	1:6–21
C Naomi and Ruth arrive in Bethlehem at the time of barley harvest	1:22
X <b>Ruth the “virtuous woman” becomes a blessing in Israel</b>	2:1–3:18
C’ Boaz “redeems” Ruth at the gate of the town of Bethlehem	4:1–10
B’ The elders at the gate of the town of Bethlehem bless Ruth	4:11–16
A The “son of Naomi” (4:17) becomes the great grandfather of David	4:17–22
<b><i>2<sup>nd</sup> Level Menorah: Ruth—a “Virtuous Woman” Is a Blessing</i></b>	<b><i>Ruth 2–3</i></b>
A Ruth seeks favor with Boaz by showing that she is a “virtuous woman”	2:1–16
B Present blessing by God and Boaz—an ephah of barley	2:17–18
C Naomi asks Ruth: “Where did you glean today?”	2:19
X <b>Blessing: “Yahweh has not forsaken the living or the dead”</b>	2:20
C’ Ruth reports the words of Boaz: “(Glean) close by my servants”	2:21–23
B’ Future blessing by God through Boaz	3:1–5
A Ruth finds favor with Boaz by showing that she is a “virtuous woman”	3:6–18

As we have already seen, the center of the acrostic poem in Prov 31:10–31 is verse 23, which concerns the husband of the “virtuous woman,” who “is known in the city gates when he sits among the elders of the land.” This is the focus of attention in Ruth 4:1–10, when Boaz “redeems” Ruth at the gate of the town of Bethlehem. Together with the brief note of Ruth’s arrival in Bethlehem “at the beginning of barley harvest” in 1:22, the account of Boaz at the city gate functions as a literary frame around the second level menorah pattern in Ruth 2–3. The outer frame here moves from a description of Ruth seeking favor with Boaz by showing that she is a “virtuous woman” (2:1–16), to the explicit designation of Ruth as a “virtuous woman” אשת חיל (3:11), within a larger context in which Ruth finds favor with Boaz (3:6–18).

The structural center of the book of Ruth focuses on the blessing of Naomi—“Yahweh has not forsaken the living or the dead.” As I have shown elsewhere, this verse corresponds with the structural center of the book of Lamentations, which has essentially the same message: “For Yahweh will not reject forever” (Lam 3:31).<sup>13</sup>

The outermost frame in the concentric structure of the book of Ruth moves from disaster to blessing. On the one hand, Naomi is bereft of her husband Elimelech and her sons, Mahlon and Chilion in the land of Moab (Ruth 1:1–5). On the other hand, we have the birth of Obed to Naomi’s daughter-in-law Ruth in Bethlehem of Judah (4:13–17). When Obed was born, the women of the neighborhood declared, “A son has been born to Naomi” (4:17). The book concludes with a genealogical note that Obed was the grandfather of King David. At the structural center of the book we find Naomi’s blessing, which was proclaimed prior to the marriage of Ruth and Boaz, “Blessed be (Boaz) by Yahweh, whose kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead” (2:20). That blessing is ultimately actualized in the birth of Ruth’s great-grandson David (4:18–22), who established the monarchy in Jerusalem.

The concept of the Festal Scrolls in the literature of ancient Israel began with the composition of Lamentations, which may be outlined in a two-level menorah pattern:

<b><i>Lamentations in a Menorah Pattern: Destruction of Jerusalem</i></b>		<b><i>Lamentations 1–4</i></b>
A	Jerusalem remembers her days of misery	1:1–11
B	A cry for help even though the punishment is justified	1:12–22
C	Yahweh as enemy has destroyed land, city, and temple	2:1–11
X	<b>Yahweh’s “vengeance” on Jerusalem—judgment and salvation</b>	2:12–4:11
C’	There was no one to turn to for help	4:12–22
B’	Remember us, O Yahweh, we are weary with hard labor	5:1–10
A’	Our dancing has been turned to mourning—renew our days as of old	5:11–22
<b><i>2<sup>nd</sup> Level Menorah: Yahweh’s “Vengeance” on Jerusalem</i></b>		<b><i>Lam 2:12–4:11</i></b>
A	Dying children, horror, jeers, and prayer	2:12–22
B	Yahweh’s anger: He lies in wait for me like a predatory animal	3:1–15
C	Lament: “I say, ‘Gone is my glory, and all that I hoped for’”	3:16–18
X	<b>Yahweh’s <i>hesed</i>: “Yahweh will not reject forever” (3:31)</b>	3:19–39
C’	Lament: “My eyes flow without ceasing . . . until Yahweh sees”	3:40–51
B’	We have sinned, but so have our enemies—pay them back!	3:52–66
A	Jerusalem has suffered a fate worse than Sodom	4:1–11

The original “Festal Scroll” was the book of Lamentations, which was written shortly after the fall of Jerusalem in 587 BCE and was used in an annual commemoration of that tragic event. The first “canonical edition” of the Festal Scrolls (the Hagiographa) appeared in the 17-book deuteronomic canon of the Tanakh in the sixth century BCE, when the scrolls of Ruth, Song of Songs, and Ecclesiastes were added and associated with the festivals of Pentecost, Passover, and Booths respectively. The five Festal Scrolls (*Megilloth*) of the masoretic tradition appeared in the 22-book pentateuchal

canon of the Tanakh with the addition of the scroll of Esther, which was associated with the festival of Purim from the time of Ezra (ca. 400 BCE).

In the concentric reading of the book of Lamentations, we find that Jerusalem remembers her days of misery (1:1–11); for indeed her dancing has been turned to mourning and so she pleads with Yahweh to “renew our days as of old” (5:11–22). The cry for help is uttered even though she knows full well that the punishment is justified (1:12–22); and so she asks Yahweh to remember his people who are weary with hard labor (5:1–11). Yahweh himself is the one who has chosen to destroy Israel (2:1–11); for Jerusalem has suffered a fate worse than Sodom (4:1–11). Nonetheless, even though it was Yahweh who brought this suffering on his people, the poet declares, “I shall place my trust in him” (3:1–22). The suffering is justified; and so the poet admonishes, “Let us test and examine our ways, and return to Yahweh. Let us lift up our hearts as well as our hands to God in heaven” (3:40–41). He then reflects on what the enemies have done and on God’s response to his prayer (3:46–57); and he concludes with a prayer for retribution, “Pay them back for their deeds, O Yahweh, according to the work of their hands!” (3:64).

In the canonical text of the Tanakh, as preserved in *The Leningrad Codex*, the reader needs to turn only a single page to get from the poem on the “virtuous woman” of Prov 31:10–31 to the reference to Ruth as the “virtuous woman” in Ruth 3:11. One needs to turn only one more page to get to the Song of Songs, and two pages to encounter the lovely dancing Shulamite (שלמית “Solomoness”) of Song 7:1 [Eng. 6:13]. The form here is the feminine of Solomon שלמה. The term שלמית designates the bride in her honorary role as “princess,” companion to the bridegroom “king.”

The Song of Songs displays an elaborate concentric structural pattern, which may be outlined in a three-level nested menorah pattern:

<b>Song of Songs in a Menorah Pattern: A Dramatic Love Poem</b>		<b>Song of Songs 1–8</b>
A	Introduction: the maiden longs for her lover	1:1–4
B	Maiden: my own vineyard I have not kept	1:5–8
C	Dialogue: lovers express their desire for each other	1:9–2:17
X	<b>Lovers express their desire for each other</b>	3:1–6:12
C´	Dialogue: lovers express their desire for each other	7:1–8:10
B´	Youth: not even Solomon’s vineyard can compare with my vineyard	8:11–12
A	The lover calls and the maiden answers	8:13–14
<b>2<sup>nd</sup> Level Menorah: Lovers Express Desire for Each Other</b>		<b>Song of Songs 3–6</b>
A	Nighttime search by the woman and Solomon’s wedding procession	3:1–11
B	The man praises her matchless beauty	4:1–7
C	The man urges his beloved to come away with him	4:8
X	<b>Dialogue on lovemaking</b>	4:9–5:7
C´	Colloquy of the women: “What makes your lover so special?”	5:8–10
B´	The woman praises her lover and the man praises his beloved	5:11–6:9
A	The woman describes a journey in chariots with the prince	6:10–12

<b>3<sup>rd</sup> Level Menorah: Dialogue on Lovemaking</b>		<b>Song of Songs 4:9–5:7</b>
A	The man praises his beloved	4:9–11
B	The man speaks: “A garden locked is my sister, my bride”	4:12–14
C	The woman speaks: “Let my lover come to his garden”	4:15–5:1a
X	<b>Coda: “Eat, companions, drink and become drunk, O lovers”</b>	5:1b
C’	The man speaks: “Open to me my sister, my companion”	5:2–3
B’	The woman speaks: “I myself arose to open to my lover”	5:4–5
A	The man withdraws and the woman searches for him	5:6–7

The woman’s lover in the Song of Songs is described with the term *dôd* (דוד), which may be interpreted symbolically as “David” דוד, written in Hebrew with the same consonants. In this regard, one should note the Shulamite’s description of her lover in response to the question asked by the daughters of Jerusalem: “My lover is radiant and ruddy / distinguished among ten thousand” (5:10). When the young David was first brought before the prophet Samuel, he is described as “ruddy,” with a fine appearance and handsome features (1 Sam 16:12). And as a warrior in relation to King Saul, after David slew Goliath, the women danced and sang: “Saul has slain his thousands / and David his tens of thousands” (1 Sam 18:7–8). This same refrain is repeated on the lips of the servants of Achish, king of Gath, after David fled from Saul (1 Sam 21:11). It appears a third time on the lips of the Philistine commanders shortly before the fateful battle on Mount Gilboa in which Saul and Jonathan were killed.

Song of Songs was composed as the Festal Scroll for Passover, not to displace the traditional Passover tradition in Exodus 1–15, but to supplement it. The words of Song of Songs 3:6 thus take on double meaning: “Who is this going up from the wilderness like columns of smoke?” Taken in isolation these words recall the ancient ritual of traditions about the “Wars of Yahweh,” as remembered at Gilgal in the Passover ceremony of premonarchic Israel. But the words quickly shift their meaning within their own literary context (Song 3:6–8).

What is that coming up from the wilderness, like a column of smoke,  
perfumed with myrrh and frankincense,  
with all the fragrant powders of the merchant?  
Behold, it is the litter of Solomon! Sixty warriors surround it;  
of the warriors of Israel—all girt with swords and expert in war,  
each with his sword at his thigh against alarms by night.

The ancient tradition of the “Wars of Yahweh” is linked to the Davidic dynasty and to Solomon in particular.

Ruth is the great-grandmother of David. In the wedding procession of Song of Songs 3:6–11, the Shulamite is part of the “litter of Solomon,” which is “coming up from the wilderness” (3:6). The imagery comes from the “march of conquest” in Israel’s ancient traditions of the “Wars of Yahweh.” That ancient march of conquest, in which Yahweh himself led the way, marching in the van of his mighty army, the people of God, entered the Promised Land from Moab, the homeland of Ruth.

In a symbolic sense, we find the same picture in the story of Ruth; only this time the Divine Warrior of times past has come in the form of a lowly servant girl. Ruth becomes part of the people of Israel on the basis of her character as the “virtuous woman” אִשֶׁת חַיִל of wisdom tradition. The message is subtle, but powerful. The God of ancient Israel is the sovereign of the nations, even despised enemies of times past (i.e., Moab); and his glorious power is revealed in the unexpected form of a suffering servant who plays an essential role in the birth of David as Yahweh’s anointed one, the Messiah. It is no wonder that the figure of Ruth is of central importance in Matthew’s presentation of Yeshua the Messiah as “the son of David, the son of Abraham” (Matt 1:1 and 5).

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<sup>1</sup> On this passage, see the article by Casper Labuschagne in *ZAW* 79 (1967), 364-367.

<sup>2</sup> Karl Budde regarded the book of Ruth as a midrash on 1 Sam 22:3 (*ZAW* ?? [1892], 43ff).

<sup>3</sup> Casper Labuschagne, private communication.

<sup>4</sup> D. L. Christensen, *Deuteronomy 21:10-34:12*. Word Biblical Commentary 6B (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001).

<sup>5</sup> Patrick Skehan, “A Single Editor for the Whole Book of Proverbs,” *CBQ* 10 (1948), 115-130.

<sup>6</sup> D. L. Christensen, *Bible 104: The Writings* (North Richland Hills, TX: BIBAL Press, 1998), 47-50.

<sup>7</sup> L. Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1961), 115-130.

<sup>8</sup> D. L. Christensen, *Bible 104: The Writings* (North Richland Hills, TX: BIBAL Press, 1998), 3.

<sup>9</sup> Addison G. Wright, “The Riddle of the Sphinx: The Structure of the Book of Qoheleth,” *CBQ* 30 (1968), 313-333. See also his article: “The Riddle of the Sphinx Revisited: Numerical Patterns in the Book of Qoheleth,” *CBQ* 42 (1980) 38-51; and “Additional Numerical Patterns in Qoheleth,” *CBQ* 45 (1983), 32-43.

<sup>10</sup> Casper Labuschagne, *Numerical Secrets of the Bible: Rediscovering the Bible Codes* (North Richland Hills, TX: BIBAL Press, 2000), 75-104.

<sup>11</sup> “Symmetrical Design in the Book of Ruth,” *JBL* 84 (1965), 165-168.

<sup>12</sup> See in particular A. Boyd Luter and Richard O. Rigsby, “An Adjusted Symmetrical Structuring of Ruth,” *JETS* 39 (1996), 15-28.

<sup>13</sup> D. L. Christensen, *Bible 104: The Writings* (BIBAL Press, 1998), 68-70.