



Journey to

# *Redemption*

A study of the Book of *Ruth*

Jeremy C. Higle

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## **Journey to Redemption (ESV® Edition)**

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# Preface

Dear fellow lovers and learners of God's Word,

When people offer me compliments about my writing or teaching, I often quip “God filled the Bible with really good stuff, so I’m just trying not to mess it up!” This is exactly how I felt while writing this short study on Ruth. My humble intention is to be a thoughtful tour guide for the reader, pointing out beautiful details that can be missed when moving too quickly.

Since this book focuses on the experiences of two women, I considered asking a woman to write this study. After prayer and thought, I decided to author the book myself, but to recruit several women to give me feedback along the way. Their feedback sensitized me to perspectives I would have missed otherwise.

You will also find several illustrative stories from my family's years working in South Asian mountain villages. The lives of those people now are much like ancient Bethlehem. I took the picture below in one of those barley fields some years ago.

I pray the Lord will use this study to help you love and learn His Word more and more.

Peace and hope,



Jeremy C. Higle



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# *1. God Is Always at Work*

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## *Ruth 1:1*

**T**he book of Ruth has fascinated readers for thousands of years. Many say it is one of their favorite stories in the Bible. It is certainly one of mine. Here are a few of the reasons we find ourselves drawn to the story in this short book:

- It is a powerful story about love in multiple dimensions: faith, friendship, community, courtship, and family.
  - It is a literary masterpiece with dialogue, suspense, wordplays, and a plot that is complex but easy to follow.
  - It is a powerful, living example of what eternal promise proclaimed in Psalm 130:7b-c?
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To better understand Ruth's unique circumstances let's ask three questions: Who were the Moabites? What was it like to live in the days of the judges? What is the significance of Ruth in world history? First...

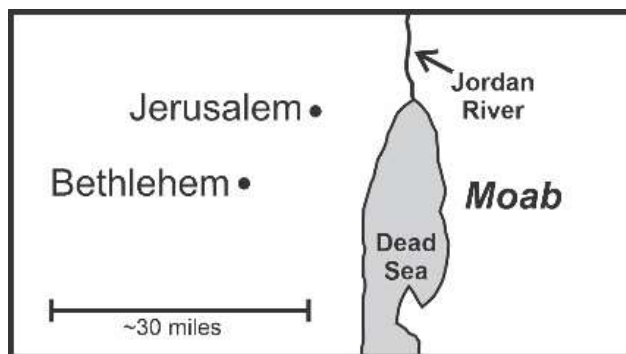
### **Who were the Moabites?**

Ruth was a Moabite. These were pagan people living east of the Jordan River. A man named Moab was the founder of this nation and a distant relative of the Israelites. What was the relationship of Moab's parents, according to Genesis 19:36-37?

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These descendants of Lot settled on a fertile, isolated strip of land between the Dead Sea and a vast Arabian desert. The area was well suited for raising livestock and was protected by deep river gorges called “wadis.”



The Bible mentions several conflicts between the Moabites and Israelites through generations. These led to deep distrust and disdain between the nations. Here are three examples:

When Moses was leading the Israelites into the Promised Land, they camped on the plains of Moab near the Jordan River. The king of Moab feared they would attack him. So, he hired a pagan oracle named Balaam to put a curse on the Israelites. God intervened (with a talking donkey among other things) and Balaam ended up blessing the Israelites (Num. 22:5-24:25).

What second conflict occurred between the Israelites and Moabites at that same time, according to Numbers 25:1-3?

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In the end, Israel entered the Promised Land without attacking and invading Moab. But a generation later, a third conflict occurred:

*And the people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, and the LORD strengthened Eglon the king of Moab against Israel, because they had done what was evil in the sight of the LORD. He gathered to himself the Ammonites and the Amalekites and went and defeated Israel. And they took possession of the city of palms (Judg. 3:12-13).*

How long did this oppression last, according to Judges 3:14?

*And the people of Israel served the king of Moab \_\_\_\_\_ years.*

Some scholars suggest the events in the book of Ruth happened during this time. The exact time is uncertain, but we know one thing for sure—Moab has been a spiritual and political enemy of Israel for generations. A Moabite like Ruth would have been received with suspicion and scorn.

### **What was it like to live in the time of the judges?**

The first verse abruptly sets the scene of the book of Ruth: *In the days when the judges ruled there was a famine in the land, and a man of Bethlehem in Judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons.* How does Judges 2:12a describe the days of the judges?

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The book of Judges records a dark, disgraceful time when *everyone did what was right in his own eyes* (Judg. 17:6b). As a result, some began to intermingle their faith and families with the pagans around them. This disunity brings spiritual and political weakness that enemies could exploit. (Judg. 1:27-36 lists all the pagan tribes that the Israelites did not drive out of the Promised Land.) Because they compromise and intermarry idol-worshipping tribes, what does the Lord declare to His people in Judges 2:3?

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Over and over God allows these idol worshipping enemies to invade, loot, and oppress the disobedient Israelites. The result is oppression, poverty, and fear among God's people. Then, at just the right times, the Lord calls out ordinary people as "judges" to lead a spiritual and military revival. There are twelve of these judges, indicating a great number of revivals in Israel.

Sadly, what follows these great spiritual revivals under the judges, according to Judges 2:19?

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As modern Christians, we are tempted to think God's judgment comes on a nation because of the sins of lost people. But the book of Judges shows us God's judgment comes primarily because of the sins of His people. God commands His people to demonstrate His love and His truth to the world. When we forget His plan, we can expect His discipline. In fact, the book of Judges explicitly says God uses godless nations of the world to test His people to see *whether they will take care to walk in the way of the LORD* (Judg. 2:22).

Walking with the LORD means honoring God's covenant listed in Deuteronomy 6:1-15. It can be summarized like this:

1. Love and obey the LORD (vv. 1-5),
2. Teach God's law to your children (vv. 6-9),
3. Keep away from false pagan worship (vv.10-15),
4. Remember the LORD's blessings with thanksgiving (vv. 16-25).

The nation of Israel failed repeatedly on each account during the time of the judges. However, the book of Ruth proves that **individual families can be faithful even when the culture around them is faithless**. How does Joshua express this in the last phrase of Joshua 24:15?

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This brings us to our third and final question . . .



## What is the significance of Ruth in world history?

Ruth is specifically named in only one place in the New Testament—the genealogy of Jesus. Look up Matthew 1:5-6a and fill in the following blanks:

*... and Salmon the father of Boaz by \_\_\_\_\_, and Boaz the father of Obed by \_\_\_\_\_, and Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of \_\_\_\_\_ the \_\_\_\_\_.*

There are four women mentioned in the genealogy and each one of them points us back to amazing stories. Tamar (the mistreated widow in Genesis 38), Rahab (the former prostitute in Joshua 6), Ruth (the Moabite widow), and Mary (the virgin mother of Jesus). Each was insignificant and powerless by the world's standards. Each one gives a testimony to what truth found in 1 Corinthians 1:27?

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This historical narrative describes how God uses two poor widows (Naomi & Ruth) and an aging bachelor (Boaz) to change world history. However, none of them understands what God is doing through them in the small town of Bethlehem. What does Micah 5:2b-c prophesy would eventually happen?

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Likewise, in heaven we will be amazed to see how God uses our small acts of faith to impact eternity. **God is doing “big-time” things through our “small-time” faithfulness every day.**

## What this means for us today:

1. The book of Ruth demonstrates how God is always at work through faithful believers in a fallen world. Jesus warns His people about two specific “weeds” that keep individual Christians from spiritual faithfulness: **worries of life** and **pursuit of wealth/pleasure** (Mt 13:22). What are the primary anxieties and worldly pursuits hindering the spiritual faithfulness of you and your loved ones?

Anxieties:

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Pursuits:

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2. At the birth of the church (Acts 2), we see four disciplines and two ordinances practiced in the community. God uses these practices to keep us spiritually healthy. **Circle** your personal commitment to these: (0 = Not at all; 1 = Okay; 2 = High)

### 4 DISCIPLINES

**Prayer:** 0 – 1 – 2

**Bible Study:** 0 – 1 – 2

**Fellowship:** 0 – 1 – 2

**Witnessing** 0 – 1 – 2

### 2 ORDINANCES

**Public Baptism:** Yes - No

**Lord's Supper:** 0 – 1 – 2

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