

*discover*  
**RUTH**



# STUDY GUIDE

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**RUTH**

revised by Kathleen Evenhouse  
with contributions by  
Brent and Diane Averill



*CoffeeBreak*





We thank Kathleen Evenhouse and Diane Averill, with assistance by Brent Averill, for their efforts in extensively updating and revising this study of Ruth. We also thank Sarah Schreiber, assistant professor of Old Testament at Calvin Theological Seminary, for contributions made in a theological review of the content. The original lesson material was written in 1991 by Sylvia Boomsma, and a revision by Faith Alive staff was published in 2001.

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*Please Note:* A free guardian-redeemer lesson and appendices for digging deeper into the four main lessons of this study are available online (search “Discover Ruth” at [FaithAliveResources.org](http://FaithAliveResources.org)).

# How to Study

The questions in this study booklet will help you “do it yourself” and discover together what the Bible says.

Questions are the key to Bible discovery. Through questions you search for the writers’ thoughts and ideas. The questions in this study guide are designed to help you in your quest for answers. You can and should ask your own questions too. The Bible comes alive with meaning for many people as they uncover the exciting truths it contains. Our hope and prayer is that this guide will help the Bible come alive for you.

The questions in this study are designed to be used with the New International Version of the Bible, but other translations can also be used.

## **Step 1.**

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**Read through each Bible passage several times.** Allow the ideas to sink in. Think about the meaning of the passage.

## **Step 2.**

.....

**Answer the questions** in the “What does the Bible say?” section of the study guide lesson, drawing your answers from each passage. Write answers in your own words. If you use Bible study aids such as commentaries, Bible handbooks, or Internet sites, do so only after completing your own personal study. Answering the questions before the group meets enables you to remember what you have discovered and to prepare for the group conversation.

### Step 3.

**Fill in the “Conversation” boxes** with your questions and thoughts. Include questions that you would like to discuss with the group, topics that you would like to learn more about, and ideas from the passage that have made an impact on you. For example, in the “Conversation” boxes, you might include answers to questions like these:

- What is this passage saying to me?
- How does it challenge me? Comfort me?
- Is there a promise I can claim?
- For what can I give thanks?

### Step 4.

**Have fun** talking with others about what you have discovered!

Step 1.

Step 2.

Step 3.

**1** Isaiah 1  
**Judgment and Justice**

**Getting Started**  
The prophecy of Isaiah beautifully reveals the amazing, surprising God who is the Lord of heaven and earth. Let's see what the opening chapter of Isaiah shows about this God, and how he calls his people to live.

**What Does It Say?**

**1. Isaiah 1:1**  
What does Isaiah tell us about himself and his book in the opening verse?

**2. Isaiah 1:2-9**  
What charge does God bring against his people? Describe their situation.

**3. Isaiah 1:10-15**  
In the Old Testament, God set up a sacrificial system that became part of Israel's covenant relationship with the Lord. Animals such as bulls, lambs, and goats would be sacrificed to atone for ("cover over") sin. The purpose of this type of sacrifice was to bring the people close to God and seek his forgiveness. Ultimately the sacrifices pointed to Jesus' death for our sins once and for all (Heb. 10:10, 9:26-28).  
New Moon feasts (usually the first day of the month in the Hebrew lunar calendar) and

Let's talk about ...

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# Glossary of Terms

**Bethlehem**—an ancient town in Israel; it was known earlier as Ephrathah (also Ephrath—see Gen. 35:19; Ruth 4:11); hometown of Elimelek and Naomi; known later as “the town of David” (Luke 2:4) and the birthplace of Jesus (Luke 2:11). *Bethlehem* means “house of bread.”

**blessing**—a pronouncement asking or stating that God’s favor would rest on someone, providing spiritual and material benefits from the Lord. Blessing the name of the Lord is also an appropriate response of praise to God for all he has done (see Ps. 103:1).

**clan**—a group of related families within a tribe in Israel (see, for example, Josh. 15).

**David**—the second king of Israel and an ancestor of Jesus Christ. He was called “a man after [God’s] own heart” (1 Sam. 13:14). David’s story is found in 1 Samuel 16:1 through 1 Kings 2:12, and he is the writer of many psalms (for example, Ps. 3-9; 11-32).

**elders**—respected leaders in a community who were called upon to witness business transactions, settle complaints, and judge criminal cases according to the local laws.

**ephah**—ancient dry measurement, probably about three-fifths of a bushel (5.5 gal.; 21 liters). An ephah of barley would weigh about 30 pounds (13 kg).

**Ephrathah**—the region surrounding Bethlehem; also used as a name for Bethlehem.

**glean**—to follow after harvesters and reapers and gather any grain or produce they have left behind. (See Lev. 23:22; Deut. 24:19-22.)

**guardian-redeemer**—the Hebrew word (*go’el*) for “guardian-redeemer” (or “kinsman-redeemer”) is a legal term for one who has the obligation to redeem (buy back, or bring back into safety) a relative in serious difficulty (see Lev. 25:25-55).

**Israel**—God’s chosen Old Testament people; the Israelites were the descendants of Jacob (who was renamed Israel—Gen. 32:28) and his wives Leah and Rachel.

**Judah**—the land allotted to the tribe of Judah in Israel and located west and south of the Dead Sea. This tribe was made up of the descendants of Judah, one of the twelve sons of Jacob (Israel).

**judges**—individuals who led the loose confederation of Israelite tribes from the time of Joshua to the period of kings in Israel’s history. The era of the judges was a time of upheaval, often characterized by disunity among the Israelite tribes and punctuated by periods of God’s punishment for being unfaithful and following the false gods of other nations (see Judg. 2:10-19).

**Leah**—a wife of Jacob (Israel); one of the mothers of the Israelite nation; sister to Rachel (see Gen. 29-30).

**Mara**—a Hebrew word meaning “bitter.” When she returned to Bethlehem, Naomi said the people should call her Mara (Ruth 1:20).

**Moab**—a land lying across the Dead Sea from the land of Judah; by caravan route, Moab was about 60 miles (96 km) from Bethlehem.

**Perez**—a twin son of Judah by his daughter-in-law Tamar (Gen. 38); Perez became an ancestor of Boaz, David, and Jesus (Ruth 4:18-22; Matt. 1:1-16).

**Rachel**—a wife of Jacob (Israel); one of the mothers of the Israelite nation; sister to Leah (see Gen. 29-30).

**redeem**—see **guardian-redeemer**.

**sheaves**—bundles of grain stalks bound together during harvesttime.

**Tamar**—mother of twin boys by her father-in-law Judah (Gen. 38); one of the twins, Perez, became an ancestor of Boaz, David, and Jesus (Ruth 4:18-22; Matt. 1:1-16); Tamar is also listed in the lineage of Jesus (Matt. 1:3).

**thresh**—to loosen grain from the stalk; at harvesttime communities joined together at a common threshing floor where they had cattle walk over or drag a heavy sled across grain stalks to thresh wheat, barley, oats, and other grains.

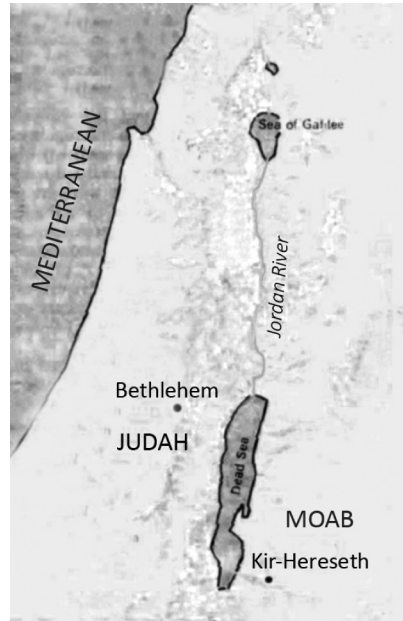
**winnow**—to throw threshed grain into the air so that chaff (lighter pieces of stalk and straw) blew away in the wind while the grain fell to the ground.



# Introduction

The story we're reading in the Book of Ruth takes place in two locations.

Most of the action occurs in Bethlehem, a town in Judah in the land of Israel. The name *Bethlehem* means “house of bread,” and this farming community was located between fertile mountain valleys and hillsides on the east and a wilderness area that reached west to the Mediterranean Sea. Normally this area received adequate rainfall and provided valuable cropland for farmers, while the nearby wilderness offered grazing land for shepherds' flocks. For more than ten years in the lives of our main characters, however, the whole region of Judah suffered from a prolonged drought and famine.



The story of Ruth begins in Bethlehem and quickly shifts to the land of Moab, located east of what is now the Dead Sea. Moab had drought-resistant and fertile tablelands watered by adequate winter rains that filled deep cisterns and wells.

Although both of these neighboring nations claimed a lineage through Abraham and spoke dialects of the same language, they did not have a friendly relationship. The Moabites were descendants of Abraham's nephew Lot (see Gen. 19:30-38). They worshiped pagan gods and had been hostile when the Israelites entered the area after their exodus from Egypt (Num. 22-25; Josh. 24:9-10). Then, during the time of the judges in Israel, the two nations were in conflict, and an uneasy relationship followed (see Judg. 3:12-30).

The book of Ruth takes place “in the days when the judges ruled” (Ruth 1:1). This was a time when the Israelite nation was not united under a king, and “everyone did as they saw fit” (Judg. 21:25). The nation was at best a confederation of tribes loosely unified around a central sanctuary, the tabernacle of the Lord at Shiloh (Judg. 18:31; 1 Sam. 1:3). Judges

(tribal leaders who were sometimes also prophets) were responsible for administering justice and providing the people a centralized authority. But this was a time of spiraling unfaithfulness to God, often characterized by disunity among the tribes of Israel and punctuated by periods of foreign oppression, punishment by the Lord for the people's disobedience (see Judg. 2:10-19). In contrast, the book of Ruth provides a story of faithfulness in this predominantly dark time; commentator Daniel I. Block calls it "a lily pad in a cesspool."

# 1 Ruth 1

## Where You Go, I Will Go

### Getting Started

The short story of Ruth is part of the history of God’s people, Israel, who were also known as the Hebrews and who wrote in the Hebrew language. Their writers didn’t overly concern themselves with historical details or explanations about their culture and customs, as we might expect today. They wrote mainly to reveal the ways God interacted with men and women in the world and how God often worked through his people. The book of Ruth is a good example of this. This purpose is also stated in the New Testament: “Everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope” (Rom. 15:4).

### What Does the Bible Say?

#### 1. Ruth 1:1-2

- a. As the story begins, what characters do we meet, and what is their situation?

Let’s talk about ...

#### Study Note: Caravan Route

Moab and Judah were connected by a caravan route that skirted the northern edge of the Dead Sea. From the area of Bethlehem the route ran northeast along a low mountain range past the fortified city of Jebus (later called Jerusalem), bypassed the ruins



of Jericho, crossed the sluggish Jordan River, and proceeded through the northern plains of Moab. The journey from Bethlehem to Moab was a rough and dangerous 60 miles (96 km) or more by camel in a trader's caravan.

- b. Elimelek chose to move to Moab even though others stayed in their homeland. What do you think were the pros and cons he considered?

For conversation...

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## 2. Ruth 1:3-5

- a. Describe the situation Naomi found herself in ten years after moving to Moab.

### Study Note: Widowhood in Ancient Times

The loss of a husband in Old Testament times was a social and economic tragedy. Without a father, husband, son, or other male relative to advocate and care for her, a woman had no legal rights, no protection, and no way to fight back against injustice. When they married, women were absorbed into their husband's family. Land was also connected to the family of the male, and a woman could only own land or a business on behalf of a husband's male heir until he came of age. Widows were often overlooked and uncared for, and they could quickly become social outcasts, especially if they had no male children to carry on their deceased husband's name. In Moab, this was the situation for Naomi, Ruth, and Orpah.

- b. After reading the study note above, discuss the pain and hardships Naomi, Ruth, and Orpah faced as widows in Moab.

I wonder about . . .

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### 3. Ruth 1:6-13

- a. What prompted Naomi to move back to Bethlehem?
- b. What kind of relationship did Naomi have with her daughters-in-law? What did she want for them?

#### Study Note: Levirate Marriage

In Ruth 1:11-13, Naomi refers to an ancient practice that had become part of Israel's law (see Gen. 38:8; Deut. 25:5-10). Called levirate marriage today (*levir* is Latin for "husband's brother"), it was designed to save from extinction the family name of a married man who died without an heir (a son). If a married man died without a son, his brother (or another near relative) would marry and try to have children for him by his widow. In Naomi's case, if a near relative married her and she gave birth to a son to carry on Elimelek's family line, one of her daughters-in-law could marry that son when he came of age.

c. What argument does Naomi use to try to convince Ruth and Orpah to stay in Moab?

d. What do verses 6, 8-9, and 13 tell you about Naomi's belief in God?

For discussion ...

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**4. Ruth 1:14-18**

a. Which daughter-in-law, Ruth or Orpah, do you think made the more sensible decision? Explain your choice.

b. What commitment did Ruth make? List the promises she made.

c. When faced with similar choices, what guidelines might we use to make life-changing decisions? How does faith affect our choices?

d. Naomi decided not to continue trying to persuade Ruth (v. 18). What does the text say prompted this decision?

My thoughts about ...

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### 5. Ruth 1:19-22

a. Describe the response in Bethlehem to Naomi's return. What possible reasons could have prompted the women's question "Can this be Naomi?"

b. The name Naomi means "pleasant" or "lovely." Why do you think Naomi no longer wanted to be called by that name? What do you think her response indicates about her view of God and her state of mind?

### Taking It Home

a. With whom do you identify in this story? What has drawn you to that person?

b. Naomi and Ruth took two journeys, one by physically traveling to Bethlehem, and one in their inner beings. What did they experience on their journey? What are some inner and outer journeys that change us?

### **For Further Study**

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Genesis 24:28, 67; 38:8

Exodus 6:7

Leviticus 26:9-12

Deuteronomy 25:5-10

Joshua 1:5, 9

Song of Songs 3:4; 8:2

Romans 8:28



The hardest times in your life may be when God does some of his greatest work in you. The book of Ruth shows what can happen when people take God at his word.

The short story of Ruth is part of the history of God's people, Israel, and it takes place "in the days when the judges ruled" (Ruth 1:1). This was generally a dark time in Israel's history, when the people did not often follow God faithfully. But the book of Ruth provides a bright spot in this difficult period, revealing how God works through his Word and through a few faithful people to bring blessing and to remain true to his centuries-old promises.

*Discover Ruth* features four lessons on the full text of the Old Testament book of Ruth. This material is intended for small group Bible study, but it can also be used profitably for personal study. Guides for leaders and group members are available.

The approach to Bible study in this series emphasizes discovery (the reader discovers what the Bible has to say by asking questions and seeking answers from the passage studied). This is an effective and enjoyable way to study God's Word.

For groups that may wish to dig deeper in their study together, **optional appendices** to the lessons are available as free electronic downloads (search "Discover Ruth" at [FaithAliveResources.org](http://FaithAliveResources.org)).

An **optional free lesson** on the guardian-redeemer concept in Scripture is also recommended for more in-depth study (available on the "Discover Ruth" webpage at [FaithAliveResources.org](http://FaithAliveResources.org)).

For a complete list of titles in the Discover Your Bible series, call toll-free 1-800-333-8300 or visit [www.FaithAliveResources.org](http://www.FaithAliveResources.org).

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