

# Ruth: A story of strength, dedication and faithfulness

## **Did you know that strong and Independent women who were survivors are demonstrated in the Bible?**

In the Bible, in what we call the Old Testament, there is a book written about Ruth. Ruth is a story about self-sacrificial love against all odds. She is a Moabite woman who marries into an Israelite family but becomes an impoverished widow. Ruth refuses to abandon her mother-in-law, Naomi—also a widow.

Together, they travel from Moab to Bethlehem, where Ruth works to provide for them both. Ruth then marries Boaz, a relative of Naomi's husband, and gives Naomi a grandchild—redeeming them from poverty and restoring Naomi's joy. This set the stage for a beautiful story of faithfulness, love and marriage. It is included in the Bible because from Ruth the Moabite and her Israelite second husband, Boaz, would come Jesus the Messiah.

Like many stories in the Old Testament, Ruth presents an unexpected reversal of the common expectations of the time. In the patriarchal culture of ancient Israel, a childless widow like Ruth would have been limited to the lowest levels of society. Her status as a foreigner from Israel's sometime-enemy Moab (Judg 3:12–21) would have reduced her social status even further. However, through her faithfulness to Naomi and her marriage to Boaz, she moves from the margins to mainline society.<sup>[1]</sup>

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Ruth provides a marvelous illustration of redemption. The law made provision for women who, due to the death of their husband, were left without heirs and faced with the loss of their property. Both heirs (Deut. 25:5–10) and property (Lev. 25:25–28) were to be secured by a “close relative,” or “kinsman redeemer” (Hebrew *goel*, 2:20; 3:9, 12–13; 4:1, 3, 6, 8, 14). This law sanctioned the ancient custom of levirate or “brother-in-law” marriage. Genesis 38:1–10 records an incident in which the custom was disregarded; the story of Ruth illustrates its proper application.

The kinsman redeemer had to meet three qualifications:

- He had to be a blood relative.
- He had to be willing to redeem.
- He had to be able to pay the redemption price.

The kinsman redeemer is a beautiful picture of Christ, who met all these qualifications (Gal. 4:4-5; Eph. 1:7; Heb. 2:14-15; 1 Pet. 1:18-19)<sup>[2]</sup>

The genealogy in Ruth and Chronicles probably came from a common temple source. These scholars argue that it is unlikely that David would have been linked to a Moabite ancestress unless he was in fact her descendant.<sup>[3]</sup>

## Rahab: A story of courage, wisdom and Faith

### **Did you know that women outside of the mainstream culture were part of the History of Jesus?**

RAHAB was a woman who acted courageously in protecting God's people. She lived in a house, which formed part of the town wall of Late Bronze Age Jericho. Soon after Moses' death, God told Joshua that he and the people were to cross the Jordan and occupy the land of promise. Before the crossing, however, Joshua sent two spies into the land to check on the opposition, in particular the fortified city of Jericho. Upon entering the city, the spies found their way quickly to Rehab's house, which were perhaps an inn and/or a brothel.

Joshua's two spies lodged with her. When they were pursued, she hid them under drying stalks of flax on the roof. The pursuers were sent off on a false trail and then Rahab made terms with her lodgers. She knew that Jericho must fall to the servants of Yahweh and so she asked for protection for herself and her family. The spies escaped from a window, with her help.<sup>[4]</sup>

For her help, the spies agreed to save Rahab and her family. The sign was to be a cord of scarlet thread hanging from her window, the same avenue the spies used to escape the city. Rahab and her family were indeed the only survivors of the subsequent battle. They were led to safety, on Joshua's command, by the very men Rahab had saved.

Rahab became the wife of Salmon and mother of Boaz, and thus an ancestor of Jesus (Mt 1:5). Rahab is listed, along with Moses, David, Samson and Samuel, as an example of faith (Heb 11:31). Her deed is an example of good works and justification (Jas 2:25).

See also Conquest and Allotment of the Land Joshua, Book of. [if  
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## Deborah: A story of a leader, judge and prophetess

### **Did you know that strong and Independent women Judged and instructed in the Bible?**

Deborah's position as a prophetess, indicating that her message was from God, is not unique in the Bible, but it was unusual. Other prophetesses included Miriam (Ex 15:20), Huldah (2 Kgs 22:14), and Anna (Lk 2:36). Deborah was unique in that only she is said to have "judged Israel" before the major event that marks her narrative (Jgs 4:4). Her husband, Lappidoth, is otherwise unknown.

Deborah, heralded as a "mother in Israel" (Jgs 5:7), remained in one location and the people came to her for guidance. Evidently, over 200 years later, when the book of Judges was compiled, a giant palm tree still marked the spot. Though residing within the boundary of Benjamin (Jgs 4:5; cf. Jos 16:2; 18:13), Deborah was probably from the tribe of Ephraim, the most prominent tribe of northern Israel. Some scholars, however, place her in the tribe of Issachar (Jgs 5:14-15). At that early time, the tribes were loosely organized and did not always occupy the territory they had been allotted.

Under Deborah's inspired leadership, the poorly equipped Israelites defeated the Canaanites in the plain of Esdraelon (Jgs 4:15); flooding of the Kishon River evidently interfered with the enemy's impressive charity (5:21-22). The Canaanites retreated to the north, perhaps to Taanach near Megiddo (v 19), and never reappeared as an enemy within Israel. The Song of Deborah (ch 5) is a poetic version of the prose narrative in Judges 4. The poem's vigorous language suggests that it was composed by an eyewitness of the battle, probably Deborah herself.

Judges 5:2 addresses Israel with an exhortation to praise the Lord. A second exclamation exhorts foreign kings to learn of Israel's God and his exploits."

According to Jdg. 4:4ff., she had her headquarters under 'the palm tree of Deborah' between Ramah and Bethel, and was consulted there by Israelites from various tribes who wished to have their disputes settled—either disputes which proved too intractable for their local judges or intertribal disputes. She was thus a judge in the ordinary, non-military sense of the word, and it was probably because of her judicial and charismatic renown

that the Israelites had recourse to her in the straits to which they were reduced under Sisera's oppression. She commanded BARAK to take the field as Israelite commander-in-chief against Sisera, and consented to accompany him at his insistence; the result was the crushing defeat of Sisera at the battle of Kishon (Jdg. 4:15; 5:19ff.). She is called (Jdg. 4:4) the wife of Lappidoth (lit. 'torches'), and she is described (Jdg. 5:7) as 'a mother in Israel'.

[if !supportFootnotes][1][endif] Elwell, W. A., & Comfort, P. W. (2001). In *Tyndale Bible dictionary* (pp. 368-369). Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

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