

MARY ESTHER RUTH

#FaithfulWomenofGod

“ A WIFE OF NOBLE
CHARACTER WHO
CAN FIND?
SHE IS WORTH FAR
MORE THAN RUBIES.
PROVERBS 31:10



RUTH: ESTHER: MARY

‘A Wife of Noble Character

Who Can Find?’

In many ways these studies are accounts of not-so-usual events. A young female refugee finds a God-fearing husband and has a baby. A woman in a high social position uses her influence for the good of her extended family. A young woman has a baby not too many months after marrying her fiancé. These sorts of things happen, to varying degrees often enough and throughout history. But with RUTH, ESTHER and MARY there are important peculiarities. One is a Moabitess who marries a Jew, another is a Jewish beauty who is queen to the king of the Persian Empire, and the last is bearing the long promised Messiah, Jesus, who has come to save his people from their sins.

These prominent Bible women, and their stories, all have something to teach us about how we live as God’s people, as disciples of Jesus, to put it in New Testament terms, in a variety of circumstances.

May God bless us as we are challenged and encouraged by these three remarkable women.

Greg Holmes - May 2018

Ruth says,

“Your people will be my people and your God my God.”

Esther says,

“And if I perish, I perish.”

And Mary says:

“I am the Lord’s servant, may it be to me as you have said.”

RUTH: ESTHER: MARY – Faithful Women of God

THE STUDIES

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Sun 14 Oct	1	Ruth 1	Naomi	5
Sun 21 Oct	2	Ruth 2	Ruth	6
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Sun 4 Nov	4	Ruth 4	Redeemer	8
Sun 11 Nov	5	Esther 1:1-3:15	Plot	10
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Sun 25 Nov	-	Vision		
Sun 2 Dec	7	Esther 8:1-10:3	Purim	12
Sun 9 Dec	8	Mary – Pre Birth	Pregnancy	14
Sun 16 Dec	9	Mary - Birth	Birth	15
	10	Mary – Post Birth*	Motherhood	16
Sun 23 Dec	-		Christmas	

*This topic is not scheduled to be preached on but is included here for 'completeness'.

Helpful References:

Webb, Barry, Five Festal Garments (Downers Grove, IVP Academic, 2000)

A highly recommended read – It is available on iBooks.

Baldwin, J. "Ruth" and "Esther" in Carson, D.A.; France, R.T.; Motyer, J.A.; Wenham, G.J. (Eds) New Bible Commentary (21st Century Edition) (Leicester, Inter-Varsity Press, 1994). *Again highly recommended.*

Duguid, I.M. Esther & Ruth (Reformed Expository Commentary Series)(?? Presbyterian and Reformed, 2005)

Bush, F.W. Ruth, Esther (Word Biblical Commentary) (Nashville, Thomas Nelson, 1996)

Nielson, K.B. Ruth and Esther (12 Week Study) (Knowing The Bible Series) Wheaton, Crossway, 2014)

Dever, M. Promises Made : The Message of the Old Testament (Wheaton, Crossway Books, 2006)

And the Mark Dever sermons on these two books at

<http://www.capitolhillbaptist.org/sermon/>

Again highly recommended.

The outline of Ruth and Esther on the Bible Project website.

<https://thebibleproject.com/all-videos/>

Again highly recommended.

Some Background : Ruth

Excerpts from Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart:

How To Read the Bible Book by Book (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2002).

Content: a story of loyalty to Yahweh during the period of the judges, in which Naomi's fortunes mirror Israel's during this period (while also providing the lineage of King David)

Historical coverage: a few years around 1100 B.C.

OVERVIEW OF RUTH

What a relief to find Ruth after Judges! Indeed, here in bold relief is another story from the same period, about one good man and two good women, not to mention a whole community, who are portrayed as faithful to the covenant. Although the book of Ruth (along with Esther) appears among the Writings in the Hebrew canon, in the Greek Bible—used by the Christian tradition—Ruth was placed between Judges and 1 Samuel, almost certainly because of the way it begins (“In the days when the judges ruled”) and ends (“Obed [was] the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of David”). You will see how perceptive that move was.

The book of Ruth is sometimes treated as a love story—and in some ways it is indeed a love story, but not a romance. Yahweh's love for Israel here finds expression in Ruth's and Boaz's loving concern for Naomi, and in Boaz's for Naomi and Ruth. Although the heart of the story features the actions of Ruth and Boaz, the central figure throughout is Naomi, as the prologue (1:1–5) and epilogue (4:13–17) make clear. The narrative plot deals with Naomi's moving from “emptiness” in a foreign land to “fullness” back home in Bethlehem in Judah, from a form of barrenness (widowhood with no male heir) to full inheritance through [p. 79] Boaz's assuming the responsibilities of kinsman–redeemer and, through his marriage to Ruth, providing her with a male heir—and what an heir he turned out to be!

The story is told in four scenes, each employing an opening thematic sentence and each, except for the last, containing a closing sentence that sets up the reader for the next scene. In turn the scenes depict Naomi's emptiness (1:6–22), her awakened hope (ch. 2), the progress toward fulfillment (ch. 3), and fullness realized in the birth of an heir (ch. 4).

And how does fullness come? Through Ruth, a young Moabite widow, and Boaz, the established, wealthy, upstanding man of Judah—extremes on the sociological scale—who both act toward the needy one (Naomi) in the way that is open to them and without considering their own benefit, and both risking all to do so. Indeed, the role played by their two foils (Orpah and the other kinsman) highlights the risk factor for each.

Study 1: RUTH 1

Naomi

A Reading Guide:

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
Ruth 1:1-7	Ruth 1:8-13	Ruth 1:14-18	Ruth 1:19-22	Judges 21:25

Explore the Basics

1. When does all this happen? What are the problems in Israel?
2. Where do Elimelech and Naomi go?
3. What happens there?
4. What does Naomi decide to do next? Why?
5. Who is Ruth and what does she do in this chapter?

Deeper and Wider

1. Why Moab? What is the problem here?
2. How does Naomi sum up her situation in v20?
3. What is the significance of v16?
4. "As the barley harvest was beginning"(v22). Why are these words significant?

Apply

1. Kindness is one of the themes of this book. How is kindness shown, by whom, and to whom?
2. Are the people in this chapter worthwhile examples to follow? Why or why not?

For Next Week: Ruth 2.

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Study 2: RUTH 2

Ruth

A Reading Guide:

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
Ruth 2:1-7	Ruth 2:8-16	Ruth 2:17-23	Deuteronomy 24:17-22	Deuteronomy 25:5-10

Explore the Basics

1. What is Naomi's and Ruth's most basic need at the start of this chapter? What is the possible solution?
2. What does Ruth find herself doing?
3. How does the owner of the field treat Ruth?
4. What is Naomi's reaction to all of this?

Deeper and Wider

1. What purpose does the task of gleaning serve? Look at Lev. 19:9-10; 23:22; Deut. 24:19.
2. "As it turned out, she found herself working in a field belonging to Boaz" (v3). What do these words hint at?
3. Why is Boaz so kind to Ruth? Note v10-12.
4. Verse 20 speaks of a kinsman-redeemer. What is such a person supposed to do? Worth looking at Deuteronomy 25:5-10

Apply

1. What kindnesses can you see in this chapter?
2. In what way is the owner of the field an example to follow?

For Next Week: Ruth 3.

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Study 3: RUTH 3

Boaz

A Reading Guide:

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
Ruth 3:1-6	Ruth 3:7-13	Ruth 3:14-18	Proverbs 31:10-31	Judges 21:25

Explore the Basics

1. Who is the instigator of the events in this chapter?
2. What does Naomi instruct Ruth to do?
3. What is Boaz's first reaction?
4. What does Boaz resolve to do?

Deeper and Wider

1. What do you think Ruth's actions imply?
2. How does Boaz describe Ruth in v11? Note Proverbs 31:10. What does this imply? (In the Hebrew arrangement of the Old Testament, Proverbs is followed immediately by Ruth).
3. What is the possible obstacle to Boaz's proposed course of action?
4. Ruth is a Moabitess. What complications does this imply in regard to the Torah? Why then does Boaz persist?

Apply

1. In many ways this is an account of a set of fairly normal events. Where is God in all this? How can this inform how we go about our lives as disciples of Jesus?
2. Consider here the example of both Ruth and Boaz. What is there to emulate here?

For Next Week: Ruth 4.

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Study 4: RUTH 4

The Redeemer

A Reading Guide:

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
Ruth 4:1-8	Ruth 4:9-12	Ruth 4:13-22	Matthew 1	Galatians 3:10-14

Explore the Basics

1. Where does Boaz go first thing the next morning? To do what?
 2. How is the possible obstacle to Boaz's intentions overcome?
 3. What is the significance of the sandal (v7)?
 4. What is the outcome of the marriage? Deeper and Wider
1. Consider Naomi's role in this whole story. Compare 1:20-21 and 4:14-17.
 2. Read v17-22. What is the significance of this?
 3. Note Matthew 1:5 and Luke 3:31? Who is Ruth's 'greater son'?
 4. Look back over the 4 chapters. How have the characters shown kindness to one another?

Apply

1. Mark Deaver maintains that one of the issues in this story is whether God's kindness is greater than the kindness of people. List the ways God's kindness is shown throughout the four chapters? Discuss how God has been kind to you and yours.
2. 'There is a redeemer.' What has the book of Ruth taught you about God and what he has done for us?

For Next Week: Esther 1,2 and 3

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Some Background : Esther

Excerpts from Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart:
How To Read the Bible Book by Book (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2002).

Content: the story of God's providential preservation of Jews throughout the Persian Empire through Mordecai and his niece, Esther

Historical coverage: most of the story takes place during a single year during the reign of Xerxes (486–465 B.C.), a generation before the events recorded in Ezra-Nehemiah

OVERVIEW OF ESTHER

With a marvellous display of wit and irony, and with obvious literary skill, the author tells the story of how Jews in the Persian Empire were saved from genocide instigated by a member of the royal court, who may himself have been a non-Persian—possibly an Amalekite who carried with him their ancient hatred for God's people.

The story revolves around the actions of its four main characters: (1) the Persian king Xerxes (mentioned by name 29x), an arrogant Eastern despot who serves as God's foil in the story; (2) the villain Haman (48x), a foreigner who has been elevated to the highest place in the empire, next to Xerxes himself—who is even more arrogant than Xerxes, and full of hatred for the Jews; (3) the Jewish hero Mordecai (54x), a lesser court official who uncovers a plot that saves the king's life, but whose refusal to bow to Haman sets in motion the basic intrigue of the plot—a plan to kill all Jews in the empire, which ultimately backfires on [p. 115] Haman; and (4) the heroine, Mordecai's younger cousin, Hadassah, given the Persian name Esther (48x), who by winning a beauty contest becomes Xerxes' queen and the one responsible for unravelling Haman's plot, thus saving the Jews from annihilation.

The story line itself is easy to follow. It begins with a lavish feast given by Xerxes and the deposal of his queen Vashti, who had refused to come and be put on display; this leads in turn to Esther's becoming queen (1:1–2:18). The basic plot of the story, with its various intrigues, unfolds in the central section (2:19–7:10), which climaxes at two private feasts that Esther holds for Xerxes and Haman. The rest of the story primarily has to do with the Jewish defeat of their enemies (the holy war again) and their celebration that eventually becomes the feast of Purim (chs. 8–9). Inside this basic plot is the story of Mordecai, who represents God's favor toward his people, so that the book concludes with Mordecai's exaltation to Haman's position, where he achieved much good for the Jewish people (ch. 10; cf. Daniel's role the century before).

Study 5: ESTHER 1:1-3:15

"Plot"

These studies, as you will have noticed, each cover considerable ground. It is worthwhile reading the full 'story' together and then answer this reduced number of questions?

A Reading Guide:

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
Esther 1:1-9	Esther 1:10-22	Esther 2:1-18	Esther 2:19-23	Esther 3:1-15

Explore the Basics

1. What happens at Xerxes 'little' banquet?
2. How does Esther become Queen?
3. What does Mordecai do for Xerxes?
4. What does Haman plot?

Deeper and Wider

1. What, do you think, motivates Mordecai's provoking of Haman?
2. What sort of people do Mordecai and Esther appear to be?
3. What impression does this account give of the Persian royal court?
4. What is your impression of Xerxes when he is at 'home'?

Apply

1. The question right through this book is where is God and what about his promises to the Jews?
2. So what can we take from the characters in the story so far?

For Next Week: Read Esther 4,5,6 and 7.

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Study 6: ESTHER 4:1-7:10

"Pivot"

A Reading Guide:

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
Esther 4:1-17	Esther 5:1-8	Esther 5:9-14	Esther 6:1-14	Esther 7:1-10

Explore the Basics

1. How does Mordecai persuade Esther to help? (Note 4:13-14)
2. What is the nature of, and result of, Esther's first approach to the king?
3. What happens in the Mordecai/Haman relationship?
4. Then what happens after the king's sleepless night?
5. What is the result of the second banquet?

Deeper and Wider

1. The Bible Project suggest that Chapter 6 is the pivot around which the story turns? What is the fundamental change that happens in this chapter?
2. Note 4:15-16. What is Esther's attitude here? Is this faith or fatalism?
3. Consider the reversal of fortunes in this story so far. Are they just happy accidents?
4. What is the problem that still needs to be resolved?

Apply

1. How do we, or should we, view the violence in these chapters?
2. So again, where is God in these chapters? How is that an encouragement to us?

For Next Week: Read Esther 8,9 and 10.

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Study 7: ESTHER 8:1-10:3

"Purim"

A Reading Guide:

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
Esther 8:1-10	Esther 8:11-17	Esther 9:1-17	Esther 9:18-32	Esther 10:1-3

Explore the Basics

1. What is Xerxes response to Esther's request to protect her people?
2. What happens on the thirteenth day of the 12th month, the month of Adar?
3. What festival is established to celebrate the Jews deliverance?
4. What does chapter 10 tell us of Mordecai's final triumph?

Deeper and Wider

1. Again, where is God in all of this?
2. How does this book treat human authority and hierarchies?

Apply

1. Proverbs 31:10-31 speaks of the 'Good Woman'. From these studies how does Esther exemplify this? Or does she?
2. God keeps his promises to his people. How does the book of Esther encourage you to trust this?

**For Next Week: Read Ruth and Esther again.
And read Matthew 1 and 2 and Luke 1 and 2**

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Some Background : Mary

Excerpts from Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit, Tremper Longman III:
Dictionary of Biblical Imagery (Leicester, IVP, 1998).

The historical evidence about the real Mary who lived in the first century is sparse, although she is the biblical woman most often mentioned by name. Her date of birth and the nature of her death are unknown. Her parentage and background are obscure.

Mary makes few appearances in the Gospels, being most visible in the accounts of Matthew and Luke. From these sources we know that Mary was a Galilean Jew. At the time of the annunciation, she was betrothed to Joseph. According to Luke's narrative, the angel Gabriel was sent to her in Nazareth with the news that she would become pregnant and give birth to a son (Lk 1:26–38). After Mary's visit to her cousin Elizabeth in the hill country of Judea and the birth of Christ in Bethlehem (Lk 1:39–56; 2:1–20), she is mentioned on only a few occasions: at the presentation in the temple, at the discovery of Jesus in the temple with the teachers of the law, at the wedding in Cana and at the cross (Lk 2:21–40, 41–52; Jn 2:1–11; 19:26–27). Sometimes she is accompanied by Jesus' brothers (Mt 12:46–50; Mk 3:31–35; Lk 8:21).

Mary's first role is that of the betrothed virgin, singled out for momentous blessing but also social ostracism. The trauma of her pregnancy is such that Joseph even considers divorcing her (Mt 1:19). But there are joy and blessing as well. When Mary and Elizabeth meet, Elizabeth prophetically greets Mary as "blessed among women, ... the mother of my Lord," blessed for believing "that what the Lord has said ... will be accomplished" (Lk 1:42–43, 45 NIV).

Mary responds with an intense song of praise to God (Lk 1:46–55). Her song is reminiscent of Hannah's prayer (1 Sam 2:1–10) and of the imagery of some of the psalms (for example, Ps 113), showing her acquaintance with the Hebrew Scriptures.

At the nativity (Lk 2:4–7) Mary is the archetypal young mother who gives birth and wraps her newborn in swaddling clothes. She is also an outcast, deprived of a suitable place for childbirth and having to settle for a barn and manger.

Another role of Mary is the sorrower—the mother forced to witness the pain of her son's suffering and execution.

The tradition that isolates Mary as a unique person elevated far beyond ordinary humanity, and even humanity itself, misses the point. ... She is an ordinary woman who responded in faith to a unique calling.

Study 8: MARY 1

Pregnancy

A Reading Guide:

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
Matthew 1:18-20	Luke 1:26-38	Luke 1:39-45	Luke 1:46-55	Isaiah 7:13-15

Explore the Basics

1. What is your impression of Mary, the mother of Jesus, from what you know of the Bible?
2. Read Matthew 1:16. Who is Mary?
3. Note also Matthew 1:18-20. What are we told about Mary here?
4. Read Luke 1:26-38. What is announced here? What is Mary's response?
5. Read Luke 1:39-45. How does Elizabeth's reaction add to our understanding of what is happening to Mary?

Deeper and Wider

1. Read Luke 1:46-55. What is the focus of Mary's song? How does she describe herself?
2. Read Matthew 1:21-23. How does this add to the story?
3. Read Isaiah 7:13-15? What does this tell us about what is happening to Mary?

Apply

1. In your daily living what should the facts that Mary's son is 'Jesus' and 'Immanuel' mean as we go about our lives?
2. Note Luke 1:38. How should we emulate Mary's attitude?

For Next Week: Read Matthew 1:24-2:23 and Luke 2:1-40.

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Study 9: MARY 2

Birth

A Reading Guide:

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
Luke 2:1-40	Matthew 1:24-2:12	Matthew 2:13-23	John 1:1-14	Philippians 2:5-11

Explore the Basics

1. Read Luke 2:1-7 and Matthew 1:24-25. How, when and where is Mary's child born?
2. Note Luke 2:19. What things do you think Mary was 'treasuring'? Why does Luke include this comment?
3. What is the result of the visit of the Magi for Mary and her family? (Matthew 2)

Deeper and Wider

1. Note Luke 2:22-24 and 39. What does this tell you about Mary and Joseph?
2. Note Luke 2:33-35. What does Simeon's 'blessing' have to say to Mary? How might this have impacted her?
3. From the Gospel material we have read what prompts us to think that this is part of a much greater story?

Apply

1. How does Mary continue to be an example for us over this stressful part of her life?
2. Note that in these passages we have studied Ruth says, "Your people will be my people and your God my God," Esther says, "And if I perish, I perish," and Mary says: ""I am the Lord's servant, may it be to me as you have said." How should these attitudes inform our discipleship?

For Next Week: Read John 19:19-30.

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Study 10: MARY 3

Motherhood

A Reading Guide:

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
Luke 2:21-40	John 2:1-11	John 19:16-30	Acts 1:1-14	Revelation 12:1-17

Explore the Basics

1. Read Luke 2:41-52. Trace what Mary's reaction to each stage of this story must have been?
2. Read John 2:1-11. What is Mary's role in this?
3. Read Mark 15:40; John 19:25-27. At the cross what would Mary's thoughts be?
4. Note Matthew 27:57-61; 28:1-10; Mark 16:1. What was Mary's 'role' around the resurrection?
5. Read Acts 1:12-14. This is the last reference in the Scriptures to Mary. What do we find her doing?

Deeper and Wider

1. Look at Luke 2:51. What does Mary have to 'treasure' in her heart?
2. Of course there is a cosmic element to what is happening to Mary in the Gospels. Read again Isaiah 7:13-15 and look at Revelation 12. What part does the 'woman' (the 'virgin') play in God's plan of salvation?

Apply

1. Discuss or consider your impressions of Mary from the passages we have looked at. What example can we take from her?
2. So how should we regard Mary?
3. Proverbs 31:10-31 speaks of the 'Good Woman'. From these studies how does Mary exemplify this?

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