

The POWER *of* FAITH



UNDERSTANDING THE BOOKS OF RUTH & ESTHER

*How Two Ordinary Woman Overcame Adversity
And Danger To Become History Makers*

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Study Guide

Understanding the Books of Ruth & Esther

— Study Guide —

This study guide is based on the book, *The Power of Faith: Understanding the Books of Ruth and Esther* by Kameel MAJDALI, published by Teach All Nations Inc. (tan.org.au). You do not need the book to answer the study questions, since most of them are based on Scripture. Excerpts found in the study guide are, however, drawn from the book. Suitable for personal and small group study, this study guide intends to point you in the right direction to discover the power of faith.

Be blessed as you study and live by Ruth and Esther. .
— Kameel MAJDALI

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A Simple Outline of the Book of Ruth

CHAPTER ONE: Tragedy for Naomi and Ruth

LOCATION: Moab

- Elimelech, Naomi and Sons Move to Moab (1:1-5)
- The Three Widows (1:6-14)
- Ruth's Transformational Decision (1:14-18)
- Ruth Moves to Judah with Naomi (1:19-20)

CHAPTER TWO: The Toil of Ruth

LOCATION: The Field of Boaz near Bethlehem

- Ruth Gleans in Boaz's Field (2:1-3)
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- Naomi 'Nudges' Ruth Towards Boaz (3:1-5)
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- Boaz Redeems Ruth (4:1-8)
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RUTH CHAPTER ONE

Tragedy for Naomi and Ruth

*Now it came to pass in the days when the judges ruled, that there was famine in the land. And a certain man of Bethlehem Judah went to sojourn in the land of Moab, he, and his wife, and his two sons ... And Elimelech Naomi's husband died; and she was left, and her two sons. 4 And they took them wives of the women of Moab; the name of the one was Orpah, and the name of the other Ruth: and they dwelled there about ten years. 5 And Mahlon and Chilion died also both of them; and the woman was left of her two sons and her husband - **Ruth 1:1-5.***

The story begins with Elimelech, his wife Naomi, and their two sons Mahlon and Chilion. They moved from Bethlehem Judah to the region of Moab, approximately fifty to sixty kilometres to the East. This was because there was a famine in the land. The two sons end up marrying local Moabite women, even though they were heathen and Moab periodically was at odds with Israel..

- What was Naomi's first tragedy (1:3)?
- What was Naomi's second tragedy (1:5)?:
- Why did Naomi decide to return to Bethlehem, Judah (1:6)?
- **Deuteronomy 25:5-10** speaks about 'Levirate marriage.' What is it?
- What verses in Ruth 1 allude to this practice?

- Many consider **Ruth 1:16** to be the key verse of the entire book. What did Ruth promise to do for Naomi?
- What were the implications of this move (use the words found in the verse [1:16])?
- On her return to Bethlehem, she no longer wanted to be called 'Naomi,' which means 'pleasant.' What did she want to be called and why (1:20-21)?

RUTH CHAPTER TWO

Ruth's Fruitful Harvest(2:1-7)

*And Naomi had a kinsman of her husband's, a mighty man of wealth, of the family of Elimelech; and his name was Boaz. 2. And Ruth the Moabitess said unto Naomi, Let me now go to the field, and glean ears of corn after him in whose sight I shall find grace. And she said unto her, Go, my daughter.3. And she went, and came, and gleaned in the field after the reapers: and her hap was to light on a part of the field belonging unto Boaz, who was of the kindred of Elimelech. 5. Then said Boaz unto his servant that was set over the reapers, Whose damsel is this? 6. And the servant that was set over the reapers answered and said, It is the Moabitish damsel that came back with Naomi out of the country of Moab – **Ruth 2:1-3, 5-6.***

The concept of 'kinsman-redeemer' (Hebrew go'el) is the dominant theme of the Book of Ruth. This explains Levirate marriage. A destitute widow can be redeemed by marriage to a near relative or kinsman.

- We are introduced to the 'kinsman-redeemer' in **Ruth 2:1**. What is his name and what do we learn about him?
- Who is his mother? (Matthew 1:5):
- Ruth decided to go to work (2:2). What did she propose to do?

- Boaz invited Ruth to glean in his field only and not glean elsewhere, and she would be taken care of. She was overwhelmed by his kindness, especially since she was a foreigner from Moab. Why did she find grace with Boaz (2:11-12)
- ‘Bitter Naomi’ had a massive change of attitude – for the better. What caused it (2:19-20):

FAITH LESSON: When you exercise faith, you find favour with God. By extension, it leads to favour with man. In other words, faith is favour-inducing.

RUTH CHAPTER THREE

Nudged into Blessing

*Then Naomi her mother-in-law said unto her, My daughter, shall I not seek rest for thee, that it may be well with thee? 2 And now is not Boaz of our kindred, with whose maidens thou wast? Behold, he winnoweth barley to night in the threshingfloor. 3 Wash thyself therefore, and anoint thee, and put thy raiment upon thee, and get thee down to the floor: but make not thyself known unto the man, until he shall have done eating and drinking. 4 And it shall be, when he lieth down, that thou shalt mark the place where he shall lie, and thou shalt go in, and uncover his feet, and lay thee down; and he will tell thee what thou shalt do - **Ruth 3:1-4.***

nudge (verb with an object); to gently prod someone to draw their attention to something.

By the power of faith, Naomi's spirit revived when she saw the evidence of God's favour on Ruth, namely the big sacks of barley and the positive report about Boaz, her near kinsman by marriage. She is going to play matchmaker by nudging Ruth to go see Boaz and nudge him, too.

- As a real mother figure, Naomi said she was responsible for seeking Ruth's welfare. What was her proposed solution for her daughter-in-law (3:2)?

This was Naomi's nudge of Ruth to confront - or invite - Boaz to do the duty of a kinsman-redeemer.

- Ruth 'nudges' Boaz: What were her first words to him (3:9):

- Boaz said two things that led us to believe he was an older man. What were they (3:10; 3:11).
- Despite the enthusiasm of Boaz to marry Ruth and be a kinsman-redeemer, there was one important complication. What was it (3:12)?
- By the power of faith, Naomi went from bitter (Mara) to pleasant and full of faith. The Naomi 'nudge' paid off. She accurately predicted that Boaz would take concrete action within twenty-four hours. What was the basis of her confidence?

RUTH CHAPTER FOUR

Redemption At Last To the Gate (4:1-5)

*And he (Boaz at the city gate) said unto the (nearer) kinsman, Naomi, that is come again out of the country of Moab, selleth a parcel of land, which was our brother Elimelech's: 4 And I thought to advertise thee, saying, Buy it before the inhabitants, and before the elders of my people. If thou wilt redeem it, redeem it: but if thou wilt not redeem it, then tell me, that I may know: for there is none to redeem it beside thee; and I am after thee. And he said, I will redeem it. 5 Then said Boaz, What day thou buyest the field of the hand of Naomi, thou must buy it also of Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of the dead, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance - **Ruth 4:3-5.***

In Chapter Four the spotlight shifts from Ruth to Boaz. He has shown himself to be a man of action. He wants to redeem and marry Ruth but he will be orderly and procedural. He will give the nearer kinsman the first option to redeem.

- The nearer kinsman was asked if he wanted to purchase/redeem Elimelech/Naomi's property. He agrees immediately. Why did he change his mind (4:5,6)?

The practice of Levirate marriage is well summarised by Boaz in **Ruth 4:9-10**. What were the terms?

- Ruth, a Moabitess, the wife of Boaz and mother of Obed, father of Jesse, father of David, was given some blessings in the name of the patriarchs. Which ones were they (4:11, 12)?
- What was the greatest honour that Ruth received (Matthew 1:5)?

Christ, the Kinsman-Redeemer

What we learn about Boaz as a kinsman-redeemer applies even more to Jesus of Nazareth. After all, He is not just a redeemer – He is the redeemer, the deliverer who comes out of Zion. He turns ungodliness away from Jacob the man and patriarch of the twelve tribes (Romans 11:26; Psalm 14:7; Isaiah 59:20). Nor is His salvation limited to one tribe; Jesus redeems all Israel and all the nations of the world. He offers each of us a way to be restored to a right relationship with God provided that we choose to accept what He offers us. Just as Ruth had to consent to Boaz's offer of redemption through marriage, we, too, have to choose to surrender our lives to Christ as our Redeemer.

Romans 7:4: *Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God.*

ESTHER CHAPTER ONE

Vashti Deposed as Queen The King's0 Feast Begins (1:1-12)

*On the seventh day, when the heart of the king was merry with wine, he commanded ... the seven chamberlains who that served in the presence of Ahasuerus the king, 11 to bring Vashti the queen before the king with the crown royal, to show the people and the princes her beauty: for she was fair to look on. 12 But the queen Vashti refused to come at the king's commandment by his chamberlains: therefore was the king very wroth, and his anger burned in him — **Esther 1:10-12.***

We are about to visit the heart of one of the grandest imperial realms in history. The Medo-Persian empire was aristocratic, cultured, liberal, tolerant, multi-ethnic, and expansive. It stretched from 'India' – probably what is now Pakistan – to 'Ethiopia', or at least Northern Sudan (1:1). The one-hundred and twenty-seven provinces were probably the equivalent of states and counties. It was not uncommon for the great provinces to be divided into little ones; the rulers of both types were called 'satraps.'

The emperor/king was Ahasuerus (also referred to as Xerxes), who reigned from 486-465 BC and fought two military campaigns against the Greeks in Thermopylae and Salamis. He took four years to prepare but, ultimately, was defeated. The great feast in Esther Chapter One was either to celebrate the launch of the ill-fated campaign or to indulge after its loss. Whether in victory or defeat, the king could comfort himself in luxury at his grand palace located at Shushan (1:2).

- Ahasuerus' queen, Vashti, rejected his command to make an appearance at the banquet (1:12). Why was her 'no-show' problematic to the king? (1:16-18):
- What was the proposed solution to the 'Vashti – problem' (1:19-20)?

ESTHER CHAPTER TWO

Esther the Queen The ‘Miss Persia’ Pageant (2:1-4)

*Let there be fair young virgins sought for the king: ... 4 And let the maiden which pleaseth the king be queen instead of Vashti. And the thing pleased the king; and he did so - **Esther 2:2b, 4.***

In this chapter we are introduced to the heroes of the story: Esther and Mordecai, both are Jewish. Esther, an orphan, is the cousin of Mordecai but she (Esther) treats him (Mordecai) more like a father. His faith and tenacity propel her from poverty to the palace. He also happens to be strategically located when two men conspire to assassinate the king. Mordecai overhears the plot and makes it known in time, thus saving the life of the king. God arranged this so that as Mordecai saved the king's life, his own life would be spared later on in the story.

- How was King Ahasuerus planning to replace Vashti as queen? (2:2-4)
- What was the response of Hegai, the keeper of the women at Shushan the palace, when he met Esther for the first time? ADD REFERENCE (2:9)

- What was the king's response when he met Esther for the first time? (2:17):
- Please consider: is there a link between the faith of Mordecai and Esther and the favour she received from Hegai, those who saw Esther (2:15), and the king himself?

ESTHER CHAPTER THREE

The Rise of Haman

*After these things did king Ahasuerus promote Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, and advanced him, and set his seat above all the princes that were with him – **Esther 3:1.***

Like the parable of the 'wheat and tares' in **Matthew 13**, just as God raised up Mordecai and Esther for 'such a time as this,' the devil was raising up his servant, Haman. He is the unbridled villain whose devilish plot almost succeeded – but it was thwarted by the power of faith.

- How did Mordechai the Jew offend Haman the Agagite? (3:2-5)
- As a response to Mordecai's alleged insubordination, what did Haman commit himself to doing? (3:6):
- What reasons did Haman give to the king why it was important to sign the decree (of execution)? (3:8).
- The king agreed with Haman's proposal. He signed and sealed the decree. **Note:** Once a Persian decree is finalised, according to the Law of the Medes and Persians, it cannot be altered – not even by the king himself. Then the decree was quickly sent by post to the entire empire. What specifically did the king decree? (3:13):

ESTHER CHAPTER FOUR

The Jews Mourn

*And in every province, whithersoever the king's commandment and his decree came, there was great mourning among the Jews, and fasting, and weeping, and wailing; and many lay in sackcloth and ashes — **Esther 4:3.***

It was possibly the blackest day in the long history of the Jewish people to date. What was already known and lamented in Shushan would soon become news across the empire. Though the execution day was almost a year away, Haman wanted everyone to know immediately about the date: the thirteenth day of Adar.

As was customary, whenever Jewish people heard bad news, they would rip their garments as a sign of mourning. So Mordecai, the catalyst for Haman's evil plot, tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and ashes. Once duly dressed for mourning, repentance and humility, he cried with a loud wail amid the city since he could not be mournful inside the king's gate (4:1-3).

- When you can't solve a problem, find someone who can. Mordechai sent an appeal for Esther to see the king and plead for mercy. Why did Esther hesitate? ADD REFERENCE (4:11)

- Mordecai sent Esther a stern warning of his own (4:13-14). In his admonition, there was a statement of faith. What was it? If Esther did not intercede for her people, deliverance for the Jews would come through another source.
- Esther took the challenge. What practical course of action would she take (4:16)? She proposed a three-day total fast (no food or water). This 'Esther Fast' was for the Queen, her maidens, and the Jews present at Shushan the palace. (NOTE: People fast because fasting works).

ESTHER CHAPTER FIVE

A Miracle in the Making

The Golden Sceptre (5:1-8)

*And it was so, when the king saw Esther the queen standing in the court, that she obtained favour in his sight: and the king held out to Esther the golden sceptre that was in his hand. So Esther drew near, and touched the top of the sceptre - **Esther 5:2.***

So much hinged on so little. One simple gesture spelled life or death for an entire people – God’s chosen people – upon whom the salvation of the world depended (John 4:22). Esther made her brave move while still fasting (5:1). She put on royal robes and went to the inner court of the king’s palace, across from the king’s house, while he sat on the throne facing the entrance. Esther positioned herself to be seen by the king from outside, before even trying to go inside his house. She was a safe distance from the palace guard, yet she was visible to the king. It was a smart though cautious move.

- On the third day, while the ‘Esther three-day total fast’ was still in action, the queen made her risky move. She showed up at the inner court of the king’s house while the monarch was sitting on his throne. If he didn’t extend the golden sceptre, Esther would be killed. What was the king’s reaction? (5:2).
- The king invited Esther to ask for whatever she wanted. What was her request to the king? (5:4).

- At the dinner that night, the king again gave Esther the right to ask whatever she wanted. What was her request? (5:7-8)
- Haman had a wonderful time at Esther's banquet but his evening was ruined because he saw Mordecai at the king's gate, who refused to show respect by standing up or moving for him when he passed by. What course of action did his advisers tell him to take? (5:14) Build a gallow 23 metres high and hang Mordecai on it.

ESTHER CHAPTER SIX

A Miracle in the Making

*On that night could not the king sleep, and he commanded to bring the book of records of the chronicles; and they were read before the king — **Esther 6:1.***

Thank God, the King Could Not Sleep (6:1-3)

Do you periodically, or regularly, have interrupted sleep? Do you spend half the night asleep and half the night awake? If so, you may want to do what Ahasuerus did and enjoy some nighttime reading. Often, it will quickly put you back to sleep.

The night after Esther's first banquet, the king could not sleep. So he asked for the book of the records of the chronicles to be brought to him to read (6:1). This book was the source of the king's honours list, and those who performed notable service would normally be recognised immediately.

Then something providential – the hand of God – came to the fore.

- While the king was reading, he discovered an overlooked act of heroism. What was it? (6:2)
- What honour and reward was given to Mordecai because of this meritorious act? (6:3)

- Ironically, it was Haman who advised the king how he could honour the man of his choosing. (6:6). What things were to be done for the honoured one? (6:7-9 – summarise these verses) Haman recommended that for the man whom the king delights to honour, give him royal apparel to wear, ride on the king's horse, and wear the king's crown. Thus lavish honour was to be an incentive for others to aspire to similar meritorious conduct
- Haman's wife Zeresh and his advisors gave him a prophecy of foreboding, which was the last thing on earth he wanted to hear (6:13). What was it? If Mordecai is of the seed of the Jews, and your plots are failing, then you are not going to prevail against him. Instead, you are doomed to failure.

ESTHER CHAPTER SEVEN

Haman on the Ropes

Esther's Request (7:1-4)

*If I have found favour in thy sight, o king, and if it please the king, let my life be given me at my petition, and my people at my request — **Esther 7:3.***

It was like déjà vu: the king and Haman were dining with Esther for the second night in a row. An exclusive banquet by the Queen of Persia, small in numbers, was attended by the most powerful men in the realm. At the 'banquet of wine' (v. 8), the king, for the third time, offered to give Esther anything she wanted, even up to half of his kingdom. He promised that it would be done (7:1-2). Though her first two requests were modest – please come to dinner – he knew as well as anyone that Esther had a much grander agenda. He was about to find out what it was.

The moment of truth had come. Esther had to muster as much courage now as she had done when the golden sceptre was extended her way. Plus, she had to do something that was normally out of the ordinary: embarrass and expose her honoured guest.

- What was Esther's request? (7:3-4):
- What was the king's reaction? (7:7)
- What was Haman's reaction? (7:5, 7)
- What was the end result? (7:9):

ESTHER CHAPTER EIGHT

Problem Solved

A Way Forward (8:1-8)

*And Esther spake yet again before the king, and fell at his feet, and besought him with tears to put away the mischief of Haman the Agagite, and his device that he had devised against the Jews — **Esther 8:30.***

What a difference three days of fasting can make. The most powerful man in the empire, after the king himself, had a spectacular fall from grace and a quick one, too. Haman, 'the Jews' enemy' (3:10), was dead and gone. Now it was time to rearrange affairs.

First, the king gave Esther the house of Haman. It was customary for the condemned man's property to be confiscated (Herodotus III:29). Mordecai then came before Ahasuerus, whom he had saved, because Esther told the king that she and Mordecai were related (8:1). This was possibly the first time the two men had ever formally met, even though Mordecai often waited at the king's gate.

- What was the king's stated reason for executing Haman? (8:7)
- Haman's original evil decree to destroy all Jews on the 13th Day of Adar could not be cancelled since it was part of the unalterable law of the Medes and Persians. But one solution – the one that was implemented – was for the king to write a counter decree. What did that decree say? (8:11-12)
- This same principle works in the spiritual realm. The law of sin and death is like the law of the Medes and the Persians. What does the 'law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus' do to the 'law of sin and death?' (Romans 8:2).

ESTHER CHAPTER NINE

D-Day

*Now in the twelfth month, that is, the month Adar, on the thirteenth day of the same, when the king's commandment and his decree drew near to be put in execution, in the day that the enemies of the Jews hoped to have power over them, (though it was turned to the contrary, that the Jews had rule over them that hated them;) – **Esther 9:1.***

D-Day - 13th Day of Adar (9:1-3)

The fateful day arrived when the decrees of Haman and Mordecai could now be legally exercised – simultaneously – since they were both scheduled for the same day. The enemies of the Jews were hoping to overpower and murder them; however, Haman's decree ricocheted back to them. The Jews were the ones who overpowered those who hated them. They gathered together in all their cities in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus so they could apprehend those who sought to do them harm. The 'fear of the Jews' fell on all the people and empowered the Jews to overcome all their adversaries (9:2). The term 'fear of the Jews' is used positively in the Book of Esther (Esther 8:17; 9:2) but not positively in the Gospel of John (John 7:13; 19:38; 20:19). Its use in Esther carries with it a strong suggestion that God intervened on behalf of the Jews to fill their enemies with a supernatural, overwhelming fear.

On Execution Day a condemned people should have had dread. They didn't. Here's why by the power of faith.

- On execution day 13 Adar, instead of being fearful, the Jewish people were confident and ready (9:1).
- Fear of Jews repelled their enemies (9:2).
- Fear of Mordecai made provincial rulers, lieutenants, depots, and officers cooperative (9:3).
- Mordecai, once condemned, was given leadership and honour (9:4)

- Ahasuerus allowed Esther to make another request, though she did not seek it. What was her request? (9:12)
- What were the total deaths of the Jews' enemies at Shushan and in the empire?
- **9:18** What did the Jews do on the 15th day of Adar? (9:18)
- The fruit of faith was to be commemorated as an annual holiday. What date was the name of the holiday (9:21)?
- What was the name of the holiday? (9:26)
- **9:22** By the power of faith, the Jewish people in the empire rested instead of worked; traded sorrow for joy, a good day instead of mourning, out of gratitude sent gifts one to another and gave alms to the poor.
- By the power of faith, like Joseph and Daniel, Esther was promoted to the palace and Mordecai was promoted to the job of his old enemy, Haman.

ESTHER CHAPTER TEN

Faith Lessons from the Book of Esther

*For Mordecai the Jew was next unto king Ahasuerus, and great among the Jews, and accepted of the multitude of his brethren, seeking the wealth of his people, and speaking peace to all his seed — **Esther 10:3.***

Chapter Ten is the last one in the Book of Esther, and it is only three verses long. Ahasuerus and Mordecai are the subjects. Esther the queen is not even mentioned. The king imposed tribute on land and islands. We are not told why, but presumably, it was to pay for wars and to compensate for the damage of Haman's failed decree (10:1). Then we are given a positive review of the greatness of the king and the power of Mordecai. We learn that the deeds and greatness of Mordecai are written in the chronicles of the kings of ancient Media and Persia (10:2).

In sweet vindication and a great reversal, Mordecai served as prime minister, second only to the king himself (10:3). This meant that he took the place of the very man who tried to destroy him and his people. Secular history may imply that Mordecai had a short term in office, perhaps less than ten years – but we really don't know. What we do know is that he was a hero to the Jews, well-received, and a benevolent benefactor to all his people.