

For such a time as this

*Four women in the
unfolding plan of God*



4 Studies

For Individuals, Groups and 1:1

Leaders' Notes for Study 1
Rahab :: Joshua 2:1 - 24 & 6:22 - 25

The book of Joshua opens as the people of Israel are about to take possession of the land of Canaan, which God had promised to their ancestor Abraham.

God had told the people through Moses that the land belonged to God (Leviticus 25:23) but that they were to possess it.

Throughout the account of the possession of the land, we see that the "rest" and salvation that God offers his people are a gift – a gift that prepares the reader for the rest and salvation that God offers us in Jesus.

Rahab is mentioned in Hebrews 11:31 as an example of someone who exercised faith.

2:1 The author chooses his words to make it clear that the spies are sleeping at Rahab's house, not engaging her for sex.

Presumably many men visited Rahab's house, so the spies' arrival would arouse little suspicion.

2:9, 11 Rahab tells the spies what she knows about God. It is this faith in the God of Israel that leads her to turn her back on her people and work for God's purposes.

6:22 We see the compassion of Joshua and his faithfulness to the promise made to Rahab.

6:24 We, like all in Jericho, were facing a sentence of death, due to our sins. Rahab was saved because of her faith in God in the same way as we are saved by faith in Christ.

Rahab becomes the mother of Boaz, and great-great-grandmother to King David, also making her part of Jesus' family tree (Matthew 1:5).

Leaders' Notes for Study 2
Deborah :: Judges 4 & 5

Deborah is unique among the Judges! She is a woman. She is not a warrior. She calls on someone else to lead the army of God's people. She is definitely not the leader we would expect!

4:1 - 2 The book of Judges presents the behaviour of God's people as a cycle, or a spiral; the people do evil, God hands the people over to their enemies, the people cry out to God, God raises up a judge to deliver them, the people live in obedience to God.

The opening verses of Judges 4 capture the beginnings of this cycle.

4:6 Deborah was a prophet - she spoke Gods' Word to Israel.

4:8 Barak is willing to do what Deborah commands, but is understandably cautious due to the sheer size of Sisera's well-armed forces! There are many others in the Old Testament who doubted their ability to lead God's people; Moses, Gideon, etc.

5:17 Sisera presumably assumed that the friendly relations between his king and the tribe of Heber the Kenite meant that he would be offered safety. However the Kenites also entered into the land along with Judah.

Leaders' Notes for Study 3

Ruth :: Ruth 1 - 4

The book of Ruth is a surprising piece of Scripture. It does not deal with the events of the nation of Israel as a whole, but with just one family. Of course, the book's concern is not just with this one family, as we shall see, but with all of God's people.

1:1 – 4 Moabite women were considered sexually immoral by the Jews, (eg Numbers 25:1 – 4) and the father of the nation was born through the incestuous relationship of Lot with his daughter. During the time of the Judges the Moabites oppressed God's people.

Ruth's Moabite heritage is pointed out six times throughout the book!

1:8 A major theme in the book is "kindness" or loving-kindness, demonstrated by God and reflected in people's behaviour toward others.

2:20 According to Old Testament law, if a husband died without leaving a son, his brother would marry the widow, and raise a son who would carry on the name of the dead man. See Deuteronomy 25:5 – 10. A similar requirement was placed on the kinsman if an Israelite needed to sell land in order to survive. See Leviticus 25:25

Further Reading

Atkinson, D. *The Message of Ruth*, BST (IVP, 1983).

Hubbard, R. L. *The Book of Ruth*, NICOT (Eerdmans, 1988).

Leaders' Notes for Study 4 Esther

Esther lived during the time of the Persians. The book was likely written between the ascension of Xerxes to the throne (486 BC) and the fall of Persia to Greece (331 BC).

Many Jews had been carried to captivity in Babylon since 586 BC. The Persians had taken over from the Babylonians as the dominant world power. King Cyrus had allowed Jews to return to Jerusalem (Ezra, Nehemiah) but many remained in the Persian Empire.

1:3 The drama of Esther unfolds over a period of nearly 10 years (see 9:1 also).

4:14 Mordecai is convinced that God will act and provide deliverance “from another place” regardless of what Esther chooses, yet he still urges Esther to act.

8:7 - 8 The salvation that God achieves is complete and utter. It points us forward to the undeserved salvation he wins for us in Christ. God is our deliver!

Study 1

Rahab :: Joshua 2:1 - 24 & 6:22 - 25

When you read a spy thriller or watch a spy movie, do you wish that you had the spies' skills, or spend the whole time worrying that they'll be caught?

When you played hide and seek as a child, what was your favourite hiding place?

Of the people you know who seem unlikely to come into a relationship with God, what is it about their lives that makes you think that?

Read Joshua 2:1 - 24

What does Rahab demonstrate that she understands about God?

At what points in the story would you say Rahab demonstrates faith in God?

How is Rahab's faith an outworking of her understanding about God.

Read Joshua 6:22 - 25

How is the salvation that God wins for Rahab and her family similar to the salvation he wins for us in Christ?

Write a definition of “Salvation” based on this episode.

How has something that you’ve learned about God in the last two years shaped your life?

What barriers might we erect (intentionally or unintentionally) to God’s saving work in those for whom we don’t expect it?

In 2:11 Rahab speaks about the sovereignty of God. How does God’s rule over everything in heaven and earth impact your life?

What does the story of Rahab teach you about God’s salvation?

Study 2

Deborah :: Judges 4 & 5

Can you recall a time when you refused to follow the instructions of your parents?

What was the outcome of your decision?

What makes it hard for you to trust God?

Read Judges 4

How does the author describe Deborah?

How would you describe Barak's faith?

What does Deborah say God is going to do in verses 7, 9 & 14?

How is the salvation won by God through Deborah and Barak similar to the salvation he wins for us in Christ?

Read Judges 5

In her song, Deborah affirms various aspects of the salvation God won for his people. What elements of the salvation does she include that aren't included in the narrative of chapter 4?

Come up with a title for Deborah's song.

If you were to write a song about the salvation that is ours in Jesus, what elements would you want to make sure you included?

How does the deliverance God has won for you in Christ impact your life?

There are a number of unexpected elements to the salvation God brings about here. What do you find surprising or unexpected in the salvation that God has won for you in Jesus?

Is there an element of obedience to God that you find especially hard?

How are you encouraged by reading of the actions of Deborah, Barak, and Jael?

Deborah sang a song to celebrate God's salvation. How do you celebrate the gift of salvation God has given you?

Study 3

Ruth

To whom in your family do you think you are most similar?

Have you ever felt alone in a strange city? What made your experience of that city what it was?

What features or character traits do you think most people look for in a spouse?

Read Ruth 1

Think of what you know (or can imagine) about life more than 1000 years before Jesus. What do you expect in the story after the opening five verses?

What picture do you have of Ruth from this chapter?

Where can you see God already at work in this episode?

Read Ruth 2 - 3

Boaz shows himself to be obedient to God's command in Leviticus 19:9 - 10 about providing for the poor. What else does this section show that he understands about God?

One of the great themes of the book is what we might call loving-kindness. What are some of the examples of this demonstrated by different people in the first three chapters?

Read Ruth 4

How does the story of Ruth help us understand the salvation that God wins for us in Jesus?

In what ways do we see Jesus act as a kinsman-redeemer?

Write a definition of salvation based on what the book of Ruth teaches us.

How would you describe the love that we see displayed by the different characters in this story?

Have there been occasions in your life when you have seen God's providential hand at work, even if you were not aware of it at the time?

It might seem something of a surprise to find a Moabite woman in Jesus' family tree (Matthew 1:5). What does Ruth's inclusion in the genealogy tell you about how God achieves his plans and purposes?

Study 4

Esther

As a child were you very good at keeping secrets?
Has your ability changed as you have got older?

Have you ever done something only because of the encouragement or prodding of someone else?

Read Esther 1:1 - 12

What information are we given here that raises your expectations for the rest of the book?

Read Esther 2: 17 - 3:9

Are there any similar events in history that give you some suggestion as to how this plot may pan out?

Thinking of the themes that run through the Bible, how serious is it if the Jews are wiped out?

Read Esther 4:1 - 14

What do we learn about Mordecai's trust in God in this episode?

What does this teach us about God's sovereignty over and through the actions of people?

How does the story of Esther help us think about taking steps to fulfil God's purposes?

Read Esther 6:6 - 14 & 7:1 - 10

How does Mordecai's good citizenship in chapter 2 pave the way for the salvation that is accomplished through Esther?

How is the salvation that God achieves for his people through Esther similar and different to the salvation God wins for us in Christ?

Read Esther 8:3 - 8

One of the themes of Esther is “reversal”; Vashti & Esther, Haman & Mordecai, the Jews & those who hate them. Where do we see this kind of reversal in the experience of the Christian person?

Write a definition of salvation based on the story of Esther.

The name of God is not used at all throughout the book of Esther. How is God portrayed since he's not named?



TRINITY MOUNT BARKER

A TRINITY NETWORK CHURCH

Office: 9 Hampden Road, Mount Barker SA 5251
08 8398 2827
info@tmb.church
www.tmb.church