



# heritage

OLD TESTAMENT STORIES OF  
COURAGE AND RESILIENCE



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# ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This guide was developed from the Middle Eastern & North African (MENA) ministry work planted by students at the University of California, Santa Barbara. InterVarsity MENA communities are a sacred space for MENA students seeking to know and follow Jesus in a way that integrates their cultural heritage.

Many MENA communities trace their heritages to the cultures reflected in the Old Testament. Studying these texts with an intentional MENA cultural lens draws out unique and meaningful reflections relevant in the lives of students today.

## **Is this only for MENA students?**

While this guide is designed for people who identify with the Middle East and North Africa on the bases of ethnicity and/or culture, many other groups may connect with its content. For example, those who trace their family heritage through immigration from any place will find resonance. It's our prayer that you'll encounter God through this guide, whoever you may be in relation to the MENA region.

## **Can I lead this if I'm not MENA?**

InterVarsity's Focused Ministries have a long history of thriving through the support of advocates from outside of the community. MENA students are often overlooked on campus and our society. A non-MENA person leading a MENA-specific small group ultimately speaks volumes of love to MENA students. Thank you for helping create space where MENA students can feel at home in InterVarsity! Flip to the back for information on coaching!

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**01/**

# **PROVISION FOR THE MARGINALIZED**

## **RUTH 2**

### **SHARE**

Where have you seen or experienced a scarcity mentality or a sense of abundance within the MENA community?

### **PRAY**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Ruth is a story from the Old Testament about a grieving family struggling to survive in a time of widespread famine and scarcity, centering the theme of God's provision despite challenging circumstances. The family consists of an Israelite widow named Naomi and her two Moabite daughters-in-law Ruth and Orpah. Naomi's sons (Ruth and Orpah's husbands) die, making them widows too and leaving the three of them without security for their basic needs. (It was very hard in those days for women without husbands or children to make money.) Naomi encourages them both to leave and seek out a better future for themselves. While Orpah sorrowfully agrees to this offer and returns to her homeland of Moab, out of love for her, Ruth insists on going with her to Naomi's homeland of Judah.

In the chapter we'll study, Naomi and Ruth are understandably operating out of a scarcity mentality, assuming there isn't enough to sustain them as widows and Ruth as an immigrant in the land. Yet, they are instead confronted with the overwhelming reality of God's loyal protection.

God supplies the family with far more security than they ever could have hoped for, and Ruth goes down in history as an ancestor of King David and even Jesus Christ. Ultimately, the Lord's abundant provision makes Ruth and Naomi, two would-be outcasts, into royalty.

## PASSAGE: RUTH 2 (NIV)

<sup>1</sup>Now Naomi had a kinsman on her husband's side, a prominent rich man of the family of Elimelech whose name was Boaz. <sup>2</sup>And Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, "Let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain behind someone in whose sight I may find favor." She said to her, "Go, my daughter." <sup>3</sup>So she went. She came and gleaned in the field behind the reapers. As it happened, she came to the part of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the family of Elimelech. <sup>4</sup>Just then Boaz came from Bethlehem. He said to the reapers, "The Lord be with you." They answered, "The Lord bless you." <sup>5</sup>Then Boaz said to his young man who was in charge of the reapers, "To whom does this young woman belong?" <sup>6</sup>The young man who was in charge of the reapers answered, "She is the young Moabite woman who came back with Naomi from the country of Moab." <sup>7</sup>She said, 'Please, let me glean and gather among the sheaves behind the reapers.' So she came, and she has been on her feet from early this morning until now without resting even for a moment." <sup>8</sup>Then Boaz said to Ruth, "Now listen, my daughter, do not go to glean in another field or leave this one, but keep close to my young women. <sup>9</sup>Keep your eyes on the field that is being reaped and follow behind them. I have ordered the young men not to bother you. If you get thirsty, go to the vessels and drink from what the young men have drawn." <sup>10</sup>Then she fell prostrate, with her face to the ground, and said to him, "Why have I found favor in your sight, that you should take notice of me, when I am a foreigner?" <sup>11</sup>But Boaz answered her, "All that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband has been fully told me, how you left your father and mother and your native land and came to a people that you did not know before. <sup>12</sup>May the Lord reward you for your deeds, and may you have a full reward from the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge!"

## PASSAGE: RUTH 2 (NIV)

<sup>13</sup>Then she said, "May I continue to find favor in your sight, my lord, for you have comforted me and spoken kindly to your servant, even though I am not one of your servants." <sup>14</sup>At mealtime Boaz said to her, "Come here and eat some of this bread and dip your morsel in the sour wine." So she sat beside the reapers, and he heaped up for her some parched grain. She ate until she was satisfied, and she had some left over. <sup>15</sup>When she got up to glean, Boaz instructed his young men, "Let her glean even among the standing sheaves, and do not reproach her. <sup>16</sup>You must also pull out some handfuls for her from the bundles and leave them for her to glean, and do not rebuke her." <sup>17</sup>So she gleaned in the field until evening. Then she beat out what she had gleaned, and it was about an ephah of barley. <sup>18</sup>She picked it up and came into the town, and her mother-in-law saw how much she had gleaned. Then she took out and gave her what was left over after she herself had been satisfied. <sup>19</sup>Her mother-in-law said to her, "Where did you glean today? And where have you worked? Blessed be the man who took notice of you." So she told her mother-in-law with whom she had worked, saying, "The name of the man with whom I worked today is Boaz." <sup>20</sup>Then Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, "Blessed be he by the Lord, whose kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead!" Naomi also said to her, "The man is a relative of ours, one of our nearest kin." <sup>21</sup>Then Ruth the Moabite said, "He even said to me, 'Stay close by my young men until they have finished all my harvest.' " <sup>22</sup>Naomi said to Ruth, her daughter-in-law, "It is better, my daughter, that you go out with his young women, otherwise someone might bother you in another field." <sup>23</sup>So she stayed close to the young women of Boaz, gleaning until the end of the barley and wheat harvests, and she lived with her mother-in-law.



## DISCUSSION

O: Observation

I: Interpretation

A: Application

- (O) List out all the action words in the text. What do you notice?
- (O/I) What does Ruth risk by gleaning in the field?
- (O) How does Boaz respond to a foreigner gleaning in his fields? (vv. 8-16)
- (I) Read Deut 10:17-18, 24:17-21, and Lev 23:22. What does the law reveal about the heart of God?
- (I) How does Boaz's faith in the God of Israel shape his actions and interpretation of Ruth's story?
- (I) Where do you see provision and abundance in the text?
- (A) How do you think grief or pain impacts trusting God's provision?

## SHARE

Where are you yearning for abundant provision in your life? Why might it be hard to trust in God with this?

## WEEKLY CHALLENGE

Spend time this week seeking and reflecting on God's provision in your life. Notice where God is already providing and bring areas of scarcity to the Lord in prayer.

02/

## RESISTANCE AND ASSIMILATION

DANIEL 3

### SHARE

When have you felt that your MENA and Western values were at odds?

### PRAY

### INTRODUCTION

The book of Daniel is a collection of stories that takes place shortly after the Israelite people in Judah were attacked by the Babylonians. Many of them were forcibly displaced from their land and resettled across the Babylonian empire (2 Kings 24:14). This book follows a group of young devout Hebrew men from the Israelite nobility (Shadrach, Meschach, and Abednego) who were captured and taken to Babylon.

We are first introduced to these friends in Daniel 1 by their Hebrew names before they were given Chaldean names: Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. (We might relate in the MENA community! Sometimes our names are changed as we negotiate retaining our family cultures while acculturating into a new one.)

The friends are faced with several ethical dilemmas in this foreign context: Is it morally acceptable to be employed by an oppressive government? What should one do when culture and faith are at odds? How can one stay true to their faith in a hostile environment? The friends haven't resisted the Babylonian regime outright, but the king asks them to contradict one of the main pillars of the Israelite faith: "You shall have no other gods before me" (Exodus 20:3). They experience external pressure from prejudiced groups to conform and must put their faith in God as they choose how to proceed.

## PASSAGE: DANIEL 3:8-29 (NIV)

8 At this time some astrologers came forward and denounced the Jews. <sup>9</sup>They said to King Nebuchadnezzar, "May the king live forever! <sup>10</sup>Your Majesty has issued a decree that everyone who hears the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe and all kinds of music must fall down and worship the image of gold, <sup>11</sup>and that whoever does not fall down and worship will be thrown into a blazing furnace. <sup>12</sup>But there are some Jews whom you have set over the affairs of the province of Babylon—Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego—who pay no attention to you, Your Majesty. They neither serve your gods nor worship the image of gold you have set up." <sup>13</sup>Furious with rage, Nebuchadnezzar summoned Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. So these men were brought before the king, <sup>14</sup>and Nebuchadnezzar said to them, "Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the image of gold I have set up? <sup>15</sup>Now when you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe and all kinds of music, if you are ready to fall down and worship the image I made, very good. But if you do not worship it, you will be thrown immediately into a blazing furnace. Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?" <sup>16</sup>Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to him, "King Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. <sup>17</sup>If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from Your Majesty's hand. <sup>18</sup>But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up." <sup>19</sup>Then Nebuchadnezzar was furious with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and his attitude toward them changed. He ordered the furnace heated seven times hotter than usual <sup>20</sup>and commanded some of the strongest soldiers in

### PASSAGE: DANIEL 3:8-29 (NIV)

his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and throw them into the blazing furnace. <sup>21</sup>So these men, wearing their robes, trousers, turbans and other clothes, were bound and thrown into the blazing furnace. <sup>22</sup>The king's command was so urgent and the furnace so hot that the flames of the fire killed the soldiers who took up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, <sup>23</sup>and these three men, firmly tied, fell into the blazing furnace. <sup>24</sup>Then King Nebuchadnezzar leaped to his feet in amazement and asked his advisers, "Weren't there three men that we tied up and threw into the fire?" They replied, "Certainly, Your Majesty." <sup>25</sup>He said, "Look! I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods." <sup>26</sup>Nebuchadnezzar then approached the opening of the blazing furnace and shouted, "Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here!" So Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego came out of the fire, <sup>27</sup>and the satraps, prefects, governors and royal advisers crowded around them. They saw that the fire had not harmed their bodies, nor was a hair of their heads singed; their robes were not scorched, and there was no smell of fire on them. <sup>28</sup>Then Nebuchadnezzar said, "Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who has sent his angel and rescued his servants! They trusted in him and defied the king's command and were willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God.

## DISCUSSION

O: Observation

I: Interpretation

A: Application

- (O/I) Unpack Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego's reply in vv. 17-18. How are they feeling? What are their motivations? What is their belief about God?
- (O/I) Track Nebuchadnezzar's emotions throughout the text. What triggers the changes in his reactions?
- (O) How did the friends' bold faith impact others? (v. 28)
- (I) What might be going on underneath the surface when the astrologers denounced the Jews? (v. 8) What effect might this have on Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego?
- (A) When have you or a family member faced similar ethical dilemmas related to your faith or culture? (ex. hide, renounce, or face consequences)
- (A) Sometimes coming from a different cultural background brings new eyes to ways faith and culture have become synchronous. What are some idols in your cultural context that others readily give themselves over to without critical reflection on God's wisdom, courage, and vision?

## SHARE

There are times we intentionally practice assimilation, perhaps for survival or to maintain peace. Where in life have you been assimilating and why? Where have you been going against the grain and why? What is God's invitation to you in these areas?

## WEEKLY CHALLENGE

**In response to God's invitation, take a step  
this week to obey in faith and trust God.**

03/

## THE VOICE OF THE DISPLACED

ESTHER 4

### SHARE

When was the last time you felt out of place?

### PRAY

### INTRODUCTION

Esther is a story from the Bible's Old Testament about a displaced Jewish community in the Persian Kingdom. It unpacks immigrant struggles, issues of underrepresentation, and facing discrimination. Interestingly, it is the only book of the Bible that never mentions God by name. This trains us to look for the Lord's divine work in the background of our lives and gives us hope, even if God seems far away.

Esther and her relative Mordecai find themselves in drastically different positions, as Esther is recently wed to the King of Persia, and Mordecai has upset the King's second-in-command, Haman. In an act of revenge against Mordecai, Haman uses his power to initiate a genocide of all the Jews in the empire, including Esther, who has been hiding her ethnic identity while living in the palace.

Today we'll study chapter four, where Mordecai points out Esther's proximity to power. He asks her a key question that makes her consider her heritage, privilege, and God's deliverance of her people.

In the end, Esther finds favor with the King and exposes Haman's evil plan, and the story concludes with Mordecai being elevated and celebrated as the new replacement for Haman's position, representing a new era of security and honor for the Jews in Persia.

## PASSAGE: ESTHER 4 (NIV)

<sup>1</sup>When Mordecai learned of all that had been done, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the city, wailing loudly and bitterly. <sup>2</sup>But he went only as far as the king's gate, because no one clothed in sackcloth was allowed to enter it. <sup>3</sup>In every province to which the edict and order of the king came, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, weeping and wailing. Many lay in sackcloth and ashes. <sup>4</sup>When Esther's eunuchs and female attendants came and told her about Mordecai, she was in great distress. She sent clothes for him to put on instead of his sackcloth, but he would not accept them. <sup>5</sup>Then Esther summoned Hathak, one of the king's eunuchs assigned to attend her, and ordered him to find out what was troubling Mordecai and why. <sup>6</sup>So Hathak went out to Mordecai in the open square of the city in front of the king's gate. <sup>7</sup>Mordecai told him everything that had happened to him, including the exact amount of money Haman had promised to pay into the royal treasury for the destruction of the Jews. <sup>8</sup>He also gave him a copy of the text of the edict for their annihilation, which had been published in Susa, to show to Esther and explain it to her, and he told him to instruct her to go into the king's presence to beg for mercy and plead with him for her people. <sup>9</sup>Hathak went back and reported to Esther what Mordecai had said. <sup>10</sup>Then she instructed him to say to Mordecai, <sup>11</sup>"All the king's officials and the people of the royal provinces know that for any man or woman who approaches the king in the inner court without being summoned the king has but one law: that they be put to death unless the king extends the gold scepter to them and spares their lives. But thirty days have passed since I was called to go to the king." <sup>12</sup>When Esther's words were reported to

## PASSAGE: ESTHER 4

Mordecai, <sup>13</sup>he sent back this answer: "Do not think that because you are in the king's house you alone of all the Jews will escape. <sup>14</sup>For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?" <sup>15</sup>Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai: <sup>16</sup>"Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my attendants will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish." <sup>17</sup>So Mordecai went away and carried out all of Esther's instructions.



## DISCUSSION

O: Observation

I: Interpretation

A: Application

- (O/I) How does Mordecai respond to the coming destruction of the Jews? What is Esther's initial response? How do their positions and identities influence their response?
- (O/I) Track Esther's emotions throughout the chapter. Something shifts in Esther by verse 16. What might have caused that shift? What impact does it have?
- (I) In the beginning of the story, Mordecai tells Esther to hide her identity because it was a risk (2:10, 20). When Mordecai talks with Esther, he refers to the Jews as "her people" - why might this be complicated for Esther?
- (A) What is the purpose of lament when we know that deliverance comes from the Lord?
- (A) As we read the story, we find Mordecai desperate for someone in power to do something for him and his people, while Esther is feeling the pressure of responsibility when people are depending on her. In this season of your life, do you resonate more with Mordecai or Esther? What has shaped your relationship with your ethnic identity and/or faith community?

## SHARE

What's an example of a time you felt convicted to use your voice and speak up, even when it came at a cost to you? What was the cost? Share why you did or didn't speak up.

## WEEKLY CHALLENGE

Find an opportunity this week to use your voice for good, to defend someone else, even if it's costly for you.



# PLANT MENA

We hope this series has helped you and your community meditate on God's word and your heritage. We believe that Middle Eastern & North African individuals gathering together around Scripture is something sacred.

If you're interested in hosting continued fellowship for MENA students through InterVarsity on your campus, we'd love to help you get started! Connecting with others on the basis of both culture and faith can be restorative because participants don't feel the need to explain themselves to one another. It can also be illuminating, because it affirms that culture and faith can be harmonious. A MENA community may be something deeply necessary for both yourself and the people around you.

We offer support through: coaching, small group resources, funding, and more. Whether you're curious or ready to go, we'd love to meet you. Send us a note at: [mena@intervarsity.org](mailto:mena@intervarsity.org)





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