

PHOTOGRAPHY BY KENNETH BERG | TEXT BY BRENDA DUFF



Lam Ruth

A Story of Loss, Love & Redemption

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SPECIAL THANKS

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and Janell Wimberly.

a photographic journey through the book of Ruth

The scenes portrayed in this book were photographed in the Holy Land, within close proximity to the actual sites where they originally took place nearly three thousand years ago.





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FOREWORD How is it possible that a story written 3,000 years ago could still touch our hearts so deeply and change our lives profoundly when it is retold?

I Am Ruth is a powerful story of loss, love, and redemption that transcends time and space.

I Am Ruth beautifully portrays a basic human truth about suffering and faith. It begins with the friendship of two women grieving the loss of husbands, children, home, and hope.

“Look,” said Naomi to Ruth, “your sister-in-law is going back to her people and her gods. Go back with her.”

But Ruth replied, “Don’t urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me”.
—Ruth 1:15–17 (NIV)

The love story between Ruth and Boaz, her kinsman redeemer, is a picture of God’s love for each of us poured out through the life, death, and resurrection of our Redeemer, Jesus. But this is not the book of Boaz. Ruth is the great-grandmother of David. Both Ruth and Boaz are mentioned in the Messianic genealogy of Matthew 1:5.

But into the tapestry of the redemption story there is a golden thread of hope and loyalty woven throughout the narrative. Shining brightly through the picture of sorrow is the faithful love of two

friends, Ruth and Naomi. . . . Their friendship was a bond of love that would not be turned away in the face of hardship.

What a woman Ruth must have been! The kind of friend we all long to have; the kind of strong, loyal person we all long to be! I am reminded that Ruth’s great-grandson David inherited Ruth’s strength and loyalty. David’s friendship and loyalty with Jonathan mirrors that of Ruth for Naomi. Fierce, undying loyalty and love for his friend was a quality that made David “a man after God’s own heart.”

A thousand years after Ruth traveled to Bethlehem with Naomi, our Lord Jesus was born in the village where love and loyalty and redemption was first defined. Jesus is the only Son of God, but in His humanity He is the son of Mary, descended from Ruth and the long-awaited son of David. He is our kinsman-redeemer. The Lord is also our faithful friend who says to us, like Ruth said to Naomi, “I will never leave you or forsake you!” (Heb. 13:5).

The story of Ruth is ultimately the portrait of God’s unfailing love for us no matter how difficult life may be. The story of Ruth proves that the Lord will stick by us through every hardship. Ruth’s faithful friendship is a picture of the heart of Jesus. Love that will never be turned back is a quality we see passed down from generation to generation. *I Am Ruth* is the vision of the kind of person we all long to become and the faithful life we long to live.

— Bodie Thoene

Bestselling Author of Christian Fiction
and recipient of ECPA Gold Medallion Awards

Nearing the end of the harvest;
the grain heads have been
removed, leaving just straw.

*“I will never leave
you or forsake you!”*

—Hebrews 13:5



OVERVIEW The biblical Book of Ruth takes place in the middle of the Old Testament journal of Israel. Before Ruth's story, the history of Israel began with God's promise to Abraham of salvation for all nations that would come through the seed of him and his wife Sarah. Then came Abraham's walk by faith through the Promised Land. From there, the geographical history of the Promised Land contributes to the setting and events of God's story told in the Book of Ruth.

With all the kings, pharaohs, tribal leaders, and would-be conquerors of the world, the only true leader was and is God. His plan and timing would remain consistent even in the rejection by His own people to worship glorified stone and metal carved by human hands. With mercy He rescued His people time and time again. During the days of Ruth, God provided guidance through Israel's judges. But the judges themselves would not be enough for His ultimate plan of rescue.



The hills of Judea near Jericho and Qumram, home of the Dead Sea Scrolls. These hills are steep, very dry, and hot, especially in the summer. The area has few residents beyond Bedouins who live very much as they did during biblical times.

FROM LOSS TO HOPE Through the lives of three people — Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz — God performed an act of redemption that breathes His own personal message of love. His promise to Abraham would be a hallmark in their little town of Bethlehem and God would proceed with His plan from there all the way through Israel's future history to the birth of the Messiah, our Savior.

The dearness of Ruth's story comes through the loss of land and loved ones . . . an abandonment of life and hope. Naomi had known the wonders of God for His people but soon came to know the emptiness of His silence, causing her to search her own heart.

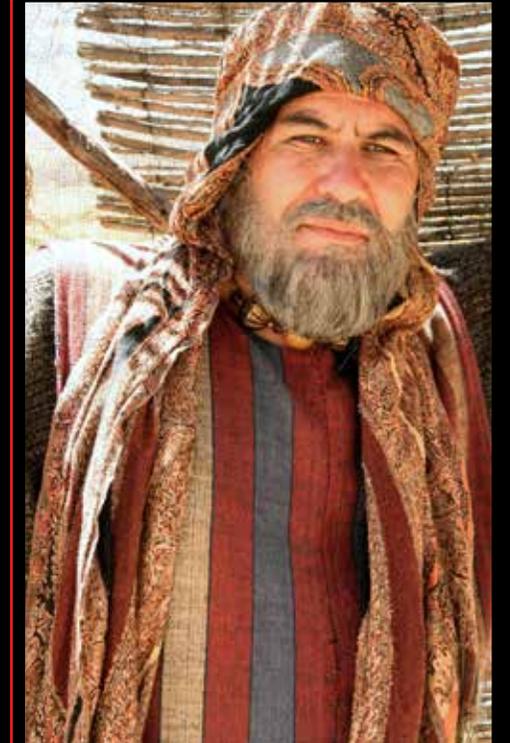
While in the foreign land of Moab, God brought a special young woman into Naomi's life. This young Moabitess named Ruth, together with Naomi, receives a new hope of life through the kinsman redeemer Boaz, all by God's faithful design.



Naomi



Ruth



Boaz

A GREATER PLAN AND PURPOSE The love of God worked its way intricately through all three of their lives bonding them together in His perfect plan. They would never have reached this sweet union without Him, and could not know their story was but a stepping stone in a lineage that would lead to Jesus Christ.

Redemption had been a part of His plan all along and through His only begotten Son, Jesus, the Messiah, came the ultimate redemption of mankind.

*The story of
Ruth is God's story
of loss, love, and
redemption.*



On the way to Moab just beyond Bethlehem.
Donkeys are still used by those who live in the
desert for transportation and work, such as
shepherding sheep.

Faith

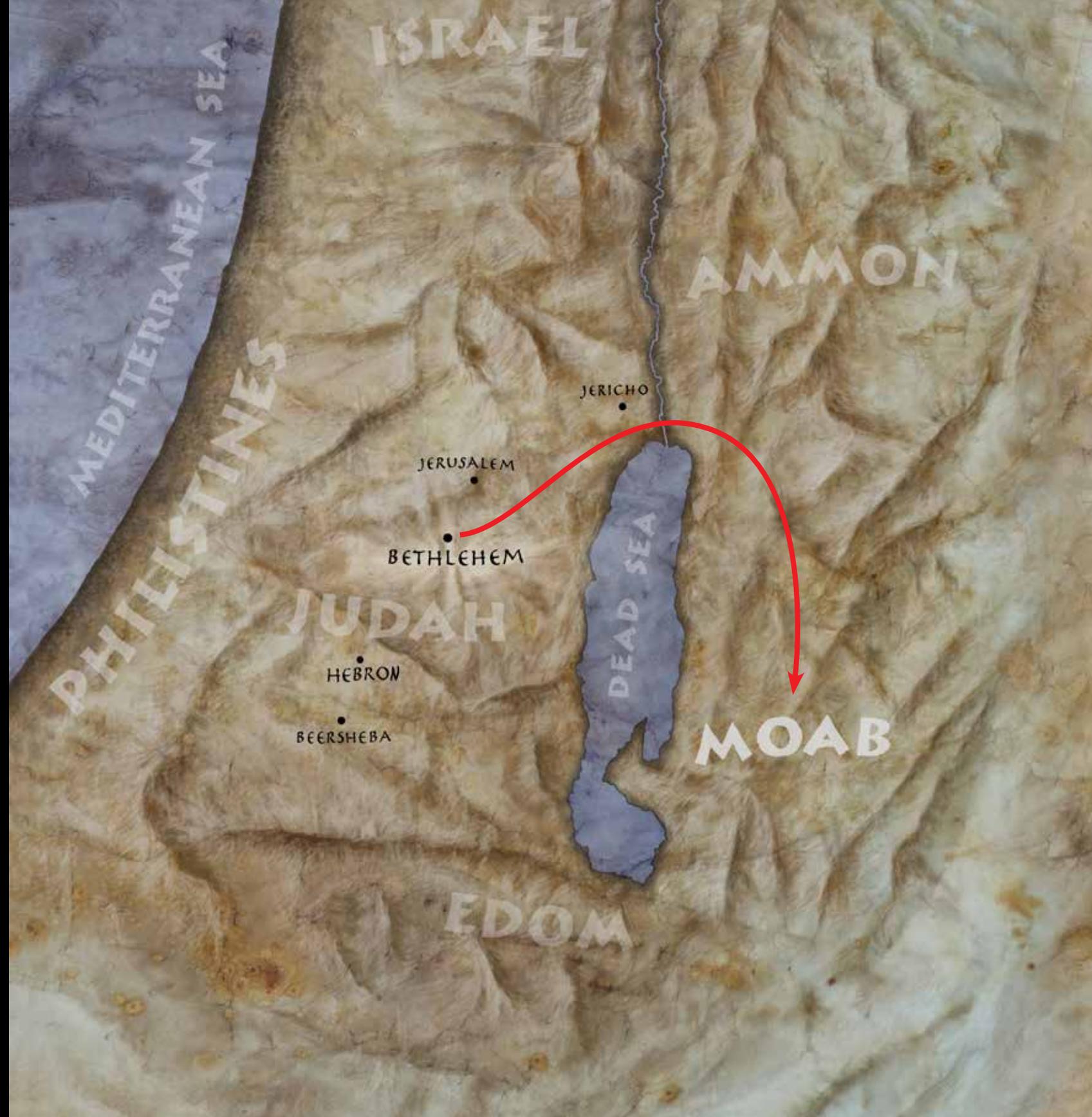
chapter one
An Ancient Pathway

Bethlehem, a small town of the tribe of Judah, was once rich and fertile. The tribe of Judah itself was one of the largest of 12 tribes that settled in the land of Canaan, each representing one of the 12 sons of Jacob who was renamed by God Himself as “Israel.” Both names are used throughout the Bible.

Bethlehem began as a tiny town, remained a tiny town throughout history, and is still a tiny town today. This is where the story of Ruth begins, a place where God Himself chose to bring people together in a prelude of His love story that continued through to the birth of Christ and beyond.

The story begins at the onset of a famine. The ancestors of the people known as the children of Israel had experienced famines in the past. In those days there were great leaders who followed God in His plan for rescue — leaders like Joseph, Moses, and Joshua. The leaders at the time of the Book of Ruth were judges who were appointed one by one to rescue the people in the war and conflict that developed with surrounding nations. Some judges are still well-known like Deborah, Gideon, and Samson.

A TIME OF HUNGER Much of the trouble came when some of the children of Israel mixed their faith in God with the worship of idols from those surrounding pagan nations. Over time, regardless of the judges’ successful rescues, the people of Israel turned away time and time again from God and began to decide for themselves what was right. And so their land, dependent on God’s rain to be rich and fertile, slowly dried up. Springtime would not bring a crop of barley to harvest. Instead there would be famine, fear, and desperation.



With farming and raising sheep as the main activities that Bethlehem’s population relied upon for food and prosperity, the sobering famine endangered everything, leaving no potential for a harvest or the joy of celebration in their hearts. It was such a sad time; they needed direction and mercy. Always in the past God had been so willing to give it, and how He must have grieved for them.

Birds could fly to better places for food, sheep had a shepherd to follow and care for them, but the people would be left to deal with their hunger, not just for food but for the loving care of their living God.

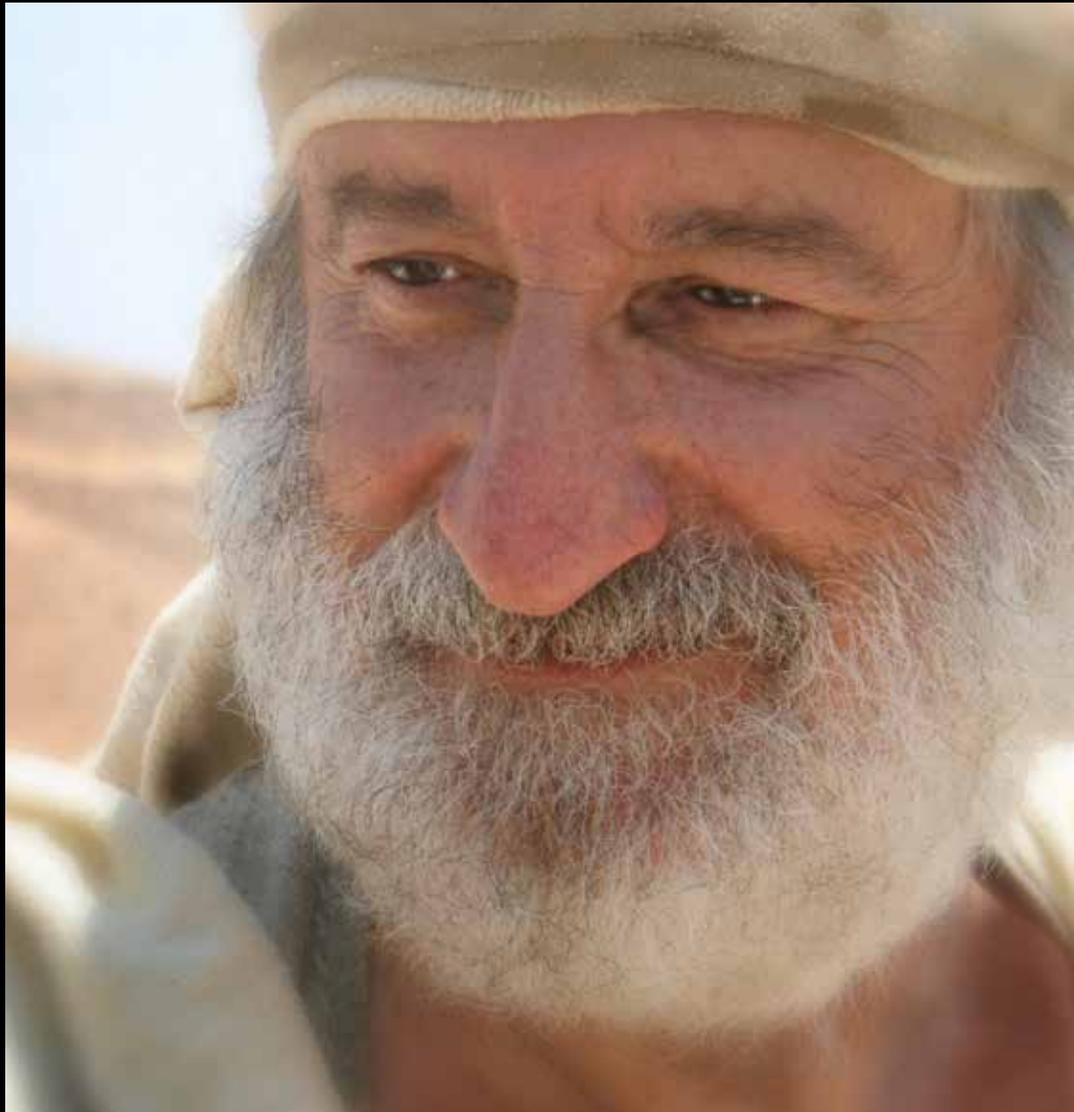
Now it came to pass, in the days when the judges ruled, that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of Bethlehem, Judah, went to dwell in the country of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons. The name of the man was Elimelech, the name of his wife was Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion — Ephrathites of Bethlehem, Judah. And they went to the country of Moab and remained there.

—Ruth 1:1–2

A TIME FOR DECISIONS Among the residents of Bethlehem was a man named Elimelech. He and his wife, Naomi, and their two sons were known as “Ephrathites.” The word comes from “Ephrath,” meaning “fruitful,” which was the ancient name of the land of Bethlehem, which itself means “house of bread.” Despite names of the past and present, this would soon no longer be considered a place of abundance.

Elimelech depended on the barley harvest to care for his family, but soon the lands were empty of any stored barley and wheat to make bread. Bethlehem is a city on a hill, with two deep valleys, one to the north and one to the south. From its height, Elimelech could see the mountains of Moab to the east. The spring rains fell more often there, sometimes even snow, and the winds would be cooler.

He faced a difficult decision. Should he take his family there? He looked into the face of his dear, faithful wife, Naomi. He knew that she and their sons would stay with him in Bethlehem or they would leave with him . . . whatever he chose to do.



REMEMBRANCES OF JOSEPH The famines of God’s judgment in the past had lasted for many years. Elimelech looked toward the south. There he could see Hebron about 20 miles away. Jacob was buried there in the field of Machpelah in a cave. It is a double cave that Jacob’s grandfather, Abraham, had bought from the Hittites as a place to bury his beloved wife Sarah.

Elimelech remembered from family history that Jacob had left Hebron at one time because of a famine in the land. Jacob had to travel a very long way south and then west to Egypt where waiting anxiously for him was his son Joseph, whom he thought had been killed by a wild animal when he was just a boy. Joseph’s brothers had secretly sold him as a slave and then told their father the false story of his death. But God had used the jealousy of his brothers to make Joseph a powerful leader in Egypt, second only to Pharaoh.

God had told Jacob not to be afraid to go to Egypt because He would go with him. Jacob was not worried because God also told him that he would be with his family and would one day bring them all back to the land of Canaan. Pharaoh provided carts for Jacob so he could bring all of his family, their livestock, and possessions to Egypt. Jacob and Joseph’s 11 brothers would have food and a place to live in Goshen during the famine.

Rescue had come for Jacob and his sons, but not without much grief and sorrow. Would God be merciful to the children of Israel once again in this famine?

When Jacob died, Pharaoh allowed Joseph to bury his father in Abraham’s burial cave where Jacob’s mother and father, Rebekah and Isaac, were also buried. There was a great procession to take Jacob’s body back to Hebron, with Joseph and his brothers and their entire households except for their little children and flocks left safely behind in Goshen. Joseph was even accompanied by all of Pharaoh’s officials, all the senior members of Pharaoh’s household, and all the senior officers of Egypt with their great number of chariots and horses.

When they arrived in Canaan, they stopped at the threshing floor of Atad, near the Jordan River, and there they held a great memorial service. For seven days they mourned for Jacob. The Canaanite people, who had been watching nearby, renamed that place “Abel-mizraim” because they thought that it was a place of deep mourning for the Egyptians.

Elimelech, whose name means “My God is King,” would have memorized the final words of his ancestor Jacob to his 12 sons, for this historical account had been told from generation to generation. To his son Judah, the father of Elimelech’s tribe, Jacob had said:

Judah, you are he whom your brothers shall praise;
Your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies;
Your father’s children shall bow down before you.
Judah is a lion’s whelp;
From the prey, my son, you have gone up.
He bows down, he lies down as a lion;
And as a lion, who shall rouse him?
The scepter shall not depart from Judah,
Nor a lawgiver from between his feet,
Until Shiloh comes;
And to Him shall be the obedience of the people.
Binding his donkey to the vine,
And his donkey’s colt to the choice vine,
He washed his garments in wine,
And his clothes in the blood of grapes.
His eyes are darker than wine,
And his teeth whiter than milk .

—Genesis 49:8–12





Along a narrow path in the rocky hills of Judea. The trees and plants grow because of a nearby water source, possibly a stream or a well. The elevation of the area makes this part of the hills cooler than the lower valleys.

