

The Story of Ruth the *Israelite!*?

Author unknown.

Have you been taught that the Moabitess Ruth, the daughter-in-law of Naomi, was a Moabite? Yes, that is the question, it is neither intended as jocular nor facetious, although it may well be rhetorical.

Ruth 1:4 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.

In the first chapter of the book of Ruth it appears to be quite clear that Ruth and her sister Orpah were Moabite by descent or lineage.

Ruth 1:1 ¶ 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 Bethlehemjudah went to sojourn **in the country of Moab**, he, and his wife, and his two sons.

Further, as we can see in the above verse, Naomi, with her husband and sons, went to sojourn “**in the country of Moab.**” Now, if we stop here, we got about as far into this matter as the traditional scholars, theologians, biblical historians, and the vast masses of people who look to the bible as the word of God. By stopping here we are doing what so many do with the bible and in bible study, we take what appears to be “obvious” and indisputable as fact, then either ignore or find it imperative to “explain away” the contradictions within scripture created by our newly created “fact.”

What contradictions are we referring to? Glad you asked. For just one (there are several):

Deut. 23:3 An Ammonite or **Moabite** shall not enter into the congregation of the LORD; even to their tenth generation shall they not enter into the congregation of the LORD **for ever**:

While “forever” in the Hebrew does not mean for the rest of eternity, it does mean so far into the future as to be impossible to “see” (or foresee from that vantage point). Thus, the expression, “**even to their tenth generation**” is not literally specific, but an idiom meaning that they can forget it, it won’t happen. So, the difficulty in justifying the two positions- (1) that Ruth was a Moabite by lineage, and (2) Naomi’s sons, as well as Boaz, would marry a Moabite and not only bring her into the “camp,” but in turn bring her into the line of David and Jesus (Yeshua), is in stark contrast with **Deut. 23:3** and what a God-fearing Israelite would possibly do, especially when we consider what God had to say about such actions, not just in this time frame, but even

in the time of Ezra. It then makes God look incompetent or extremely forgetful in His old age, or maybe God is just double-minded? Not to mention that this all transpires little more than a century after God declared His stand concerning this very matter to Israel in Deut. 23 above.

Or, is it possible, just asking mind you, is it possible that we may not yet have enough information to determine whether our “understanding” of Ruth’s heritage is biblically sound or correct? Should we not presume that in a circumstance wherein we find either, (1) our understanding is contradictory to some or all scripture, or (2) that it “appears” that the bible is contradicting itself, that we are the ones who are missing information necessary to eliminate such apparent contradictions? Let’s see if we can find out what is what- biblically.

You can do your own *in-depth* study, but just to present the *minimum* necessary to unravel this apparent contradiction let’s first begin by retracing the trail of Israel on their way out of the wilderness and into the Promised Land. We pick up the travels in Numbers 21.

Numbers 21:13 From thence they (Israel) removed, and pitched on the other side (north of) of Arnon (an east-west river), which is in the wilderness that cometh out of the coasts of the Amorites: for Arnon is the border of Moab, **between** Moab and the Amorites.

OK, note that Israel crossed the Arnon and left the nation of Moab behind them, thus now entering into the land of the Amorites. By the way, the Amorites are not Ammonites. Ammon and Moab are brother tribes or nations and related to Abraham, and thus Israel, through Lot, but Amorites were, at least generally speaking, Canaanite.

What happened next?

Numbers 21:21 ¶ And Israel sent messengers unto Sihon king of the Amorites, saying,

22 Let me pass through thy land: we will not turn into the fields, or into the vineyards; we will not drink of the waters of the well: but we will go along by the king’s high way, until we be past thy borders.

23 And Sihon would not suffer Israel to pass through his border: but Sihon gathered all his people together, and went out against Israel into the wilderness: and he came to Jahaz, and fought against Israel.

24 **And Israel** smote him with the edge of the sword, and **possessed his land from Arnon unto Jabbok, even unto the children of Ammon (Ammonites were to the east of Amorites)**: for the border of the children of Ammon was strong.

25 And Israel took all these cities: and Israel dwelt in all the cities of the Amorites, in Heshbon, and in all the villages thereof.

26 For Heshbon was the city of Sihon the king of the Amorites, who had fought against the former king of Moab, and taken all his land out of his hand, even unto Arnon.

Now we see that Israel conquered and occupied the Amorite land from the river Jabbok (an east to west tributary of the Jordan and is north of the Dead Sea) and fully eastward to the border of the Ammonites, again, related to Moab.

So, for the land between the river Jordan and the Dead Sea on the west and the border of Ammon on the east, plus the land north of Arnon all the way to the river Jabbok, was now owned and operated by Israel and their to do with as they pleased.

Side note: It is vital to make notice that this describes the borders and nations at the time being discussed. Earlier in history the nation of Moab did “occupy” or possess land north of the Arnon- all the way to Jabbok, but they lost possession of that territory prior to the Israelites appearance and as such, Moab’s northern border was the Arnon when God told Israel to “by-pass” them (Moab). To further clarify what we have just covered we can read from Deut 2 below.

Deut. 2:34 And we took all his cities at that time, and utterly destroyed the men, and the women, and the little ones, of every city, we left none to remain:

35 Only the cattle we took for a prey unto ourselves, and the spoil of the cities which we took.

36 From Aroer, which is by the brink of the river of Arnon, and from the city that is by the river, even unto Gilead, there was not one city too strong for us: the LORD our God delivered all unto us:

37 Only unto the land of the children of Ammon thou camest not, nor unto any place of the river Jabbok, nor unto the cities in the mountains, **nor unto whatsoever the LORD our God forbad us.**

Just what did some Israelites think of this newly possessed land that was “east” of Jordan?

Numbers 32:1 ¶ Now the children of Reuben and the children of Gad had a very great multitude of cattle: and when they saw the land of Jazer, and the land of Gilead, that, behold, the place was a place for cattle;

2 The children of Gad and the children of Reuben came and spake unto Moses, and to Eleazar the priest, and unto the princes of the congregation, saying,

3 Ataroth, and Dibon, and Jazer, and Nimrah, and Heshbon, and Elealeh, and Shebam, and Nebo, and Beon,

4 Even the country which the LORD smote before the congregation of Israel, is a land for cattle, and thy servants have cattle:

5 Wherefore, said they, if we have found grace in thy sight, let this land be given unto thy servants for a possession, and **bring us not over Jordan.**

The short story is that Moses and God agreed to let Reuben and Gad and half of Manasseh possess the newly possessed lands east of Jordan so long as they helped the rest of Israel conquer the lands west of Jordan.

Joshua 13 also confirms for us that Reuben, Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh received for their inheritance this land east of Jordan. The half tribe of Manasseh possessed the land of Bashan, to the north of the land of the formerly Amorite land. This area also included the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee and the east bank of the Jordan river northward to (at that time) the land of the Hittites.

But, where again did Israel cross the Jordan and enter into the land west? We all know the story of Jericho, but who recalls where it was, or what the area was called where Israel camped immediately prior to their siege of Jericho?

Numbers 33:48 And they departed from the mountains of Abarim, and pitched in **the plains of Moab** by Jordan near Jericho.

49 And they pitched by Jordan, from Bethjesimoth even unto Abelshittim **in the plains of Moab.**

50 ¶ And the LORD spake unto Moses **in the plains of Moab by Jordan near Jericho**, saying,

51 Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye are passed over Jordan into the land of Canaan;

From this we can note that the “plains of Moab” are not in Moab! They may certainly have once been “in” Moab, but at the time of the entrance into the Promised land, the Moabites all lived well to the south, and their northern national border was the river Arnon, which the Israelites had already passed over to eventually arrive at the embarkation point in the “plains of Moab” for their march forward to Jericho.

We should also note that as a matter of course and history, 1 Chronicles 5 shows that this conquered and possessed land stayed in Reuben’s, Gad’s, and the half tribe of Manasseh’s control until Assyria took them away captive some 700 years later, Manasseh being in Bashan to the north of the Plains of Moab.

One might now ask, “So, what’s the big deal? This still does not prove Ruth was *not* a Moabite by race.” Well, not in itself, and not yet, but we do have more to consider as previously stated. There is still more to the story. Remember this?

Deut. 23:3 An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter into the congregation of the LORD; even to their tenth generation shall they not enter into the congregation of the LORD **for ever:**

The Problems

1. How could a law abiding Israelite, whether Mahlon or Boaz, legally marry a Moabite?
2. How can we circumvent Deut 23:3 in order to accept the actions of Mahlon, Elimelech, Naomi, and later Boaz to let Ruth become a part of their family by law and bring her into Israel?
3. The women of Israel welcomed Ruth into the “family” in Ruth 4:11 ... The LORD make the woman that is come into thine house like Rachel and like Leah, which two did build the house of Israel: and do thou worthily in Ephratah, and be famous in Bethlehem:
4. **If Ruth was a Moabite by race, why would there be such attention to detail concerning the law of redemption by Naomi, Boaz, and the “near-kinsman” more near than Boaz?** It would all have been performed in complete opposition to the very law being invoked to settle the issue being settled!
5. Judah’s eldest two sons were slain by God, Er for his wickedness and Onan for his disrespect for the very law Boaz invokes to accomplish his goal to marry Ruth. Now Er and Onan were both from a Canaanite mother, the first wife of Judah. Point being, God slew Onan for not obeying a part of the very law that Mehlon and Boaz would likewise have been guilty of breaking had Ruth really been Moabite.

The Solutions

We should closely take notice that in Numbers 25 we see the direct result of breaking the law. Are we to believe that later on this law is “suspended” for Mahlon and then Boaz, which would also mean it was suspended for Naomi, her husband, and all who welcomed Ruth into Judah? Considering the death of 23,000 Israelites that resulted from their law breaking, might it be somewhat still in the memory and history of Naomi, her husband, her sons, and Boaz and even his near kin?

Therefore, let’s look a little closer at what is really stated in the book of Ruth.

Ruth 1:1 ¶ 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 **Bethlehemjudah** went to sojourn in **the country** of Moab, he, and his wife, and his two sons.

First of all, the use of the word “**country**” must be understood both by definition and also by context. The Hebrew word translated to “**country**” here is one that simply means or refers to “**the country**” as in a rural area or field, not a “nation.” For one example we can look at:

1Sa 27:5 And David said unto Achish, If I have now found grace in thine eyes, let them give me a place in some town in **the country** <07704>, that I may dwell there: for why should thy servant dwell in the royal city with thee?

Notice that the “town” is “in” *the country*, as opposed to a major city in a metropolitan area. As a result of this we now have absolutely no reason to assume that “the country of Moab” was “the nation of Moab.” Nor do we have any reason to claim that the “plains of Moab” were “in” the nation of Moab, the location of which we previously addressed.

Next, we can note that the time period is one where-in Israel’s tribes were not yet unified into a Federalist single nation or kingship, but were independently ruled by judges, each with jurisdiction in their own tribe and not beyond or overlapping into other tribes.

Continuing, we see that Naomi’s husband was from Judah, and a town called Bethlehem. You may have heard of this town before? Thus, Naomi, her husband and her sons, were Israelites of the tribe of Judah, and in the land of Judah.

Putting this all together, with what we have *so far*, leaves us with Naomi and her family escaping the famine by traveling to a place identified as “the fields of Moab,” which then equates better to “the plains of Moab,” which were in Reubenite and Gadite possession and inheritance. Thus, Ruth, in the land of her nativity (Ruth 2:11), was either Reubenite or Gadite.

But Wait! There’s More!

One more “problem” to solve! Was Ruth and her sister a pagan worshipper, or a worshipper of the One True God?

A funny thing happened on the way to English from the Hebrew. We, in English, have a culture or cultural thinking that “god,” from the Hebrew word “elohiym,” must always refer to a deity of some sort, whether real or imagined (pagan, etc.). Thus, we can only perceive “elohiym” as either the God, or a “god” (as in false “god”). However, the facts are that “elohiym” can, and often is, used to identify a human being, too! Please do your own research on this if you wish.

What happens if we now put everything into the newly understood context- one that has *no* biblical contradictions and complies with the stated law of God?

Ruth 1:15 And she said, Behold, thy sister in law is gone back unto **her people**, and unto **her gods**: return thou after thy sister in law.

16 And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: **thy people** shall be my people, **and thy God my God**:

17 Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: **the LORD** do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me.

Now, finally, we can see that what the translators created in error is solved and resolved in truth. The references to “elohiym” in verses 15 and 16 are addressing their respective governments of the day, their “Judges”, who were known as “elohiym”. The “capitalization” of “G” in God in verse 16 is a translators doing, not the Hebrew’s.

The “**her people**” was either Reuben or Gad, and the “**my people**” was Judah. The “**her gods**” was simply the judges in Reuben or Gad, and the “**thy God my God,**” becomes “**your judges my judges.**” Now, the additional comment by Ruth in verse 17 makes even more sense as she invokes the name of the “G”od of Israel, Yahweh, something not likely by an alien, but totally expected from a law abiding Israelite.

What other “assumptions” have we made in what we think the bible “says”? You might be surprised!

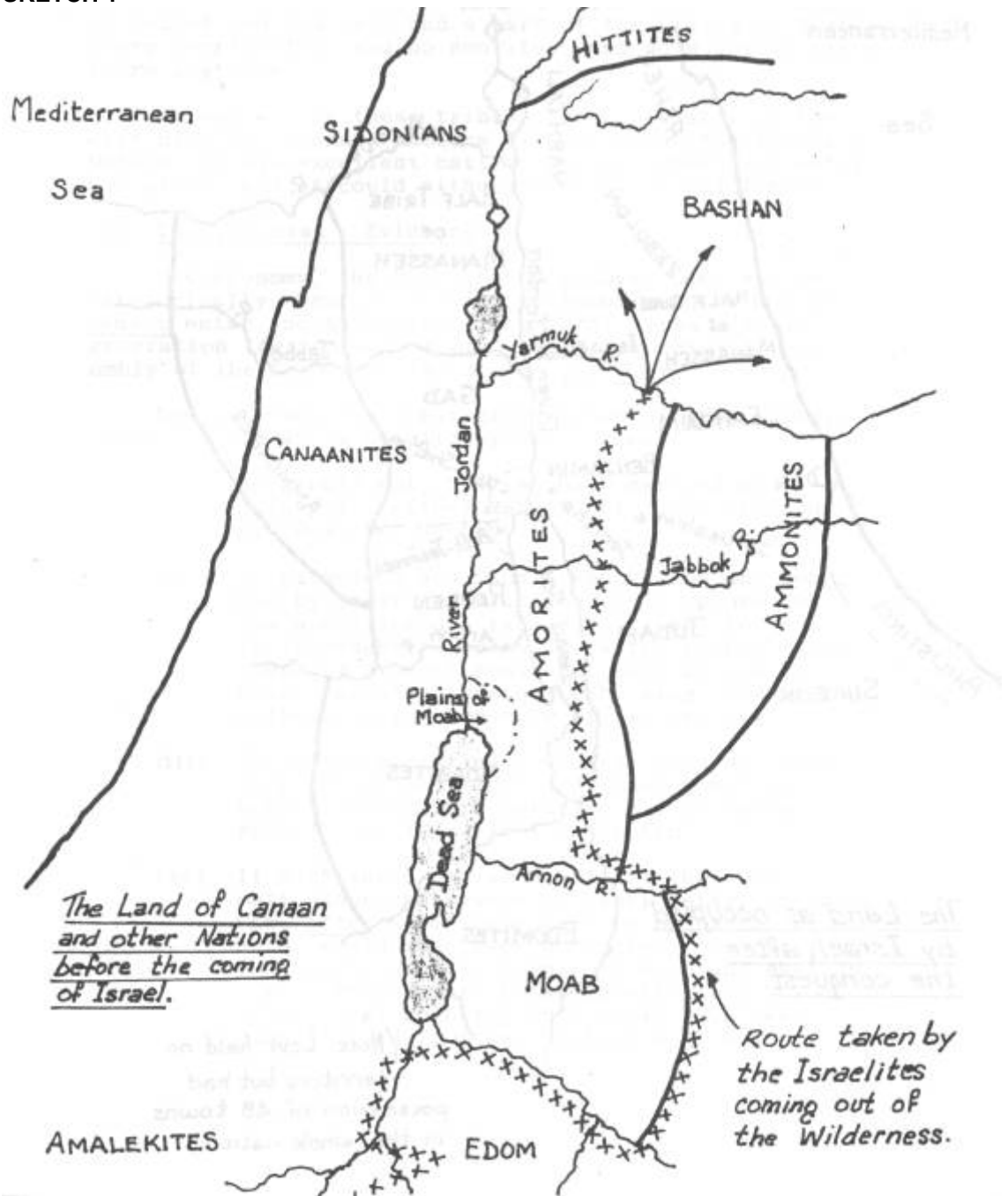
Richard Fix

August 2005

Special Appreciation is given to RK Phillips for his work in documenting and identifying what some have suspected and most never knew.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL EVIDENCE

SKETCH 1



SKETCH 2



The Land as occupied
by Israel, after
the conquest.

(Note: Levi held no territory but had possession of 48 towns in the whole nation.)