

(Excerpt from Lesson Two)

It has been said that life is like a grindstone and whether life grinds us into dust or instead polishes us depends upon the character that we possess and our view of God. At times, life is unfair. Some individuals face despairing circumstances that never touch the lives of others. Yet all individuals are presented with the decision and choice of whether or not to believe that God is sovereignly directing individual lives and seeking to bring redemption to every area. The book of Ruth invites us to see the sovereign hand of God as He brings redemption into the most tragic of circumstances.

“In the hard times, faith will sometimes mean leaving unanswered difficulties in the hands of God. Such faith will be strengthened by keeping in the front of our minds the ways God has helped us in the past.”¹

Read Ruth 1:1-5 (In times of devastating loss)

1. What a tragic introduction to the life of Naomi (verses 1-5). Identify the emotional, mental, physical, and financial impact of her circumstances and their impact to a woman living during the late twelfth century.

Naomi experienced devastating and excruciatingly painful circumstances and emotions: loss, grief, bereavement, childlessness, confusion, depression, bitterness, guilt and regret, even anxiety

¹ Phillips, Holman Old Testament Commentary: Judges and Ruth, 39.

regarding her future survival. As a foreigner in the land of Moab it is likely she faced racial and religious prejudice and rejection. This woman is in desperate need of direction, guidance, and hope. In her broken-hearted state she plans to return to God's people and unknowingly follows God's sovereign path and plan of restoration. We may not be able to change or alter our circumstances, but we may choose to surrender them to God believing that He will walk us in His path of restoration. We may never understand why we have faced difficult circumstances in our life. God never requires that we understand, but He does require that we surrender our lives to Him trusting that He will work His plan of redemption through the circumstances we face.

2. As a result of the famine in Bethlehem, Elimelech relocated his family to Moab. From your earlier research on the Moabite culture, what impact would the lifestyles and values of the Moabites have on their Christian neighbors? (Reference notes: The Moabites worshiped Chemosh, the savage war god).
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“What sadness. Elimelech’s attempt to escape the famine brought his family into a foreign land and left Naomi a widow and far more bereft and isolated than if they had remained in the fellowship of their home town.”²

Naomi’s two sons (Mahlon and Kilion) married two Moabite women (Orpah and Ruth) during their ten year stay in Moab. Deuteronomy 7:3-4 forbid marriage to a worshipper of a foreign god. Researching the historical background of the Moabite culture will help you see how God’s prohibitions were his means of protection. It is important to recognize that God’s laws were intended to protect His children. As you progress through the book of Ruth you will see that God desires to bring all people to Himself and the cost He pays to ransom all is the cost of Calvary.

3. Lot was Abraham’s nephew who had accompanied him from Ur of the Chaldeans (Genesis 12:1-4) into Canaan. When God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, Lot nearly lost his life. Due to Abraham’s intercession, the angels rescued Lot and his family. Read Genesis 19:30-38 and identify the beginning of the Moabite people.

- Numbers 25:1-3

² Atkinson, The Message of Ruth, 33.

4. Read Deuteronomy 2:9 and record the instructions God gave Israel regarding the Moabites.
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Although the Moabites were not to be destroyed, God had banned the Israelites from marriage with them. Enmity existed between these two tribes. Earlier conflict arose when the Israelites were led by Moses into Canaan. Balak, the king of Moab, feared being destroyed by the Israelites so he hired a soothsayer and a false prophet named Balaam to curse Israel. This plan failed because God would only allow Balaam to curse the people of Israel (See Numbers 24). When Balaam was unable to get financially rewarded by Balak for cursing God's people, he suggested to King Balak that Moab seduce Israel into sexual immorality with Moabite women in their fertility worship of Baal Peor. Although God would not allow a false prophet to curse His people, the Israelites were free to choose whom they worshiped.

5. Record the influence the Moabites had upon Israel in Numbers 25:1-3.
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God's directions to separate and to reject foreign gods were words of a father protecting His children. God is not a racist. He desires all to enter into a relationship with Him. The words of John 3:16 communicate his universal desire, "for God so loved the world that He gave His only

begotten Son.” God warned His children not to embrace the culture, tradition, and religions of other nations.