

NAOMI - RUTH CONNECTION

LESSON FIVE: RUTH 1:2b-3

By Sandy Harber

"And they came into the country of Moab, and continued there. And Elimelech Naomi's husband died; and she was left, and her two sons."

Elimelech's family left their home in Bethlehem because of a famine. Famine was a common form of judgment that God used to punish His people for their disobedience. The time of the judges was marked with periods of idolatry due to the failure of God's people to destroy the inhabitants of the land as He commanded them to do. Instead, they grew weary of war and allowed many of the inhabitants of Canaan to remain. The Hebrews learned to live alongside their neighbors, eventually intermarrying with them and adopting the idolatry of the Canaanites. This brought down God's judgment in various forms.

Elimelech's family found refuge in the pagan country of Moab, a nation founded from an incestuous relationship between Lot and his daughter. Chemosh, the Moabite god, was worshipped there with child sacrifice. It was an immoral and idolatrous nation.

Bible scholars have pointed out that what happened to Naomi's family foreshadowed the fate of the Jewish people as a whole. The Jews were forced to flee Israel and settle all over the world due to Roman persecution in the first century AD. Ezekiel 37 records the prophecy of their return to Israel, which we are witnessing in our lifetime.

Naomi's family fled Israel and took refuge in a Gentile country, where tragedy struck multiple times. In the end, there was only one survivor left to return to the Promised Land.

In verse 2 we learn that they settled in Moab "and continued there." They stayed. Even when the famine in Bethlehem was over (we don't know how long it lasted but it wasn't 10 years). Even when Elimelech died and they were bereft of husband and father, Naomi and her sons chose to remain in Moab.

"Return" is a key concept in the book of Ruth. But initially, there was no return. It appears that the little family was content in their new home. Just as many of the Jews chose to remain in Babylon at the end of the 70-year captivity. Naomi's family chose to remain in Moab.

When tragedy strikes, we may be driven to a strange place emotionally or spiritually. Depression is a common destination for people who suffer loss. It's understandable. But it is essential for our well-being that we are not content to "continue" there. We don't want to remain in the state that grief and sorrow have driven us to. We need to "return."

What we return to will not be the same place we left. How could it be? Someone important to us is missing. We have to find a "new normal." We make our new home with modified routines. We learn to cope.

Our coping tools include: 1) prayer and Bible reading for two-way communication with our Heavenly Father; 2) the Holy Spirit for guidance, instruction, clarification, and illumination; 3) and, other believers, who can share their own experiences and insights, who are willing to just listen with no judgment, who are available to pray for/with us, and who may provide godly advice.

"For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone; the flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land." Song of Solomon 2:11-12