

God Causes Necessary Endings So He Can Bring About New Beginnings

“So she [Naomi] set out from the place where she was with her two daughters-in-law, and they went on the way to return to the land of Judah. But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, “Go, return each of you to her mother’s house. May the Lord deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me. The Lord grant that you may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband!” Then she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept. And they said to her, “No, we will return with you to your people.” But Naomi said, “Turn back, my daughters; why will you go with me? Have I yet sons in my womb that they may become your husbands? Turn back, my daughters; go your way, for I am too old to have a husband. If I should say I have hope, even if I should have a husband this night and should bear sons, would you therefore wait till they were grown? Would you therefore refrain from marrying? No, my daughters, for it is exceedingly bitter to me for your sake that the hand of the Lord has gone out against me.” Then they lifted up their voices and wept again. And Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her” (Ruth 1:7-14).

This scene in Ruth takes place in Moab. Moab was considered a godless place because its citizens descended from Moab, who was the son of incest between the wicked Lot and his own daughter (Genesis 19:30–38). The Hebrews had ongoing hostility with the Moabites throughout their history, in large part because they worshipped a false God named Chemosh rather than Yahweh (Numbers 21:29; 1 Kings 11:7). Tragically, in the example of Elimelech, we see how a man, as the head of his home, can impact his entire family and generations to come by the decisions, good and bad, that he makes.

While in Moab, Elimelech and his wife, Naomi, saw their sons marry Moabite women, which wasn't technically forbidden in Scripture (Deuteronomy 7:1–4), but was frowned upon because followers of Chemosh were forbidden from joining God's people in worship (Deuteronomy 23:3). Furthermore, there was a long history of God's men chasing after Moabite women because they were beautiful and immodest. Nonetheless, as perhaps the only family in Moab that worshipped Yahweh, the sons had few options. So Mahlon (meaning "sickness") married the Moabite Ruth, and his brother, Chilion (meaning "failing" or "dying"), married the Moabite Orpah; the marriages lasted about 10 years before both husbands died. Tragically, the father and his two sons died in godless Moab—ironic, as the very thing they moved to Moab in an effort to escape was death.

Like much of life, the questions that arise from this story of why no children were born in 10 years and why further tragedy came is never answered. Perhaps God was withholding his blessing because of the men's sinning? Nonetheless, the scene simply shifts to the widowed Naomi who was left standing alone amidst her devastated life with her two unbelieving and likewise widowed daughters-in-law. If you can picture three widows wearing black and sobbing in a circle as they face the reality of abject poverty and absolute misery, then the opening scene of Ruth is coming into focus.

In his book *Necessary Endings*, Dr. Henry Cloud explains how there are times in life where we need to have a clear ending with a person or place so that we can heal up and move into a new season of life. This is what happens after the funerals in Moab.

For starters, the family should never have moved to Moab in the first place, and tragedy and misery were their only experiences there. So Naomi had a necessary ending with Moab. She determined that while they turned their back on God when they set their face toward Moab, it was time for her to repent and return to the Lord by now turning her back to Moab. In

this, we learn that for the good to begin, the bad must end.

Think about your children (or future children) starting their own families. Does your leadership in the home lead your family toward flourishing, both practically and spiritually? What changes should you make now to get your family on the right path? {eoa}

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