

Moabites: Friend or Foe?

When Israel lived in Shittim, the people began to commit sexual immorality with the daughters of Moab. These women invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods; then the people ate and bowed down to their gods. When Israel joined themselves to Baal-peor, the anger of the Lord flared up against Israel. The Lord said to Moses, "Arrest all the leaders of the people, and hang them up before the Lord in broad daylight, so that the fierce anger of the Lord may be turned away from Israel." So Moses said to the judges of Israel, "Each of you must execute those of his men who were joined to Baal-peor." Just then one of the Israelites came and brought to his brothers a Midianite woman in the plain view of Moses and of the whole community of the Israelites, while they were weeping at the entrance of the tent of meeting. When Phinehas son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, saw it, he got up from among the assembly, took a javelin in his hand, and went after the Israelite man into the tent and thrust through the Israelite man and into the woman's abdomen. So the plague was stopped from the Israelites. Those that died in the plague were 24,000. The Lord spoke to Moses: "Phinehas son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, has turned my anger away from the Israelites, when he manifested such zeal for my sake among them, so that I did not consume the Israelites in my zeal. Therefore, announce: 'I am going to give to him my covenant of peace. So it will be to him and his descendants after him a covenant of a permanent priesthood, because he has been zealous for his God, and has made atonement for the Israelites.'"

- Numbers 25:1-13 NET

An Ammonite or Moabite may not enter the assembly of the Lord; to the tenth generation none of their descendants shall ever do so...

- Deuteronomy 23:3 NET

Make as many notes as you can on the following, being sure to base what you say on the details of the text:

- What does Bible say about Moabites? What are they like?
- How did Israelites view Moabites?

Moabites: Friend or Foe?

The Israelites traveled on and camped in the plains of Moab on the side of the Jordan River across from Jericho. Balak son of Zippor saw all that the Israelites had done to the Amorites. And the Moabites were greatly afraid of the people, because they were so numerous. The Moabites were sick with fear because of the Israelites.

So the Moabites said to the elders of Midian, “Now this mass of people will lick up everything around us, as the bull devours the grass of the field. Now Balak son of Zippor was king of the Moabites at this time. And he sent messengers to Balaam son of Beor at Pethor, which is by the Euphrates River in the land of Amaw, to summon him, saying, “Look, a nation has come out of Egypt. They cover the face of the earth, and they are settling next to me. So now, please come and curse this nation for me, for they are too powerful for me. Perhaps I will prevail so that we may conquer them and drive them out of the land. For I know that whoever you bless is blessed, and whoever you curse is cursed.”

So the elders of Moab and the elders of Midian departed with the fee for divination in their hand. They came to Balaam and reported to him the words of Balak. He replied to them, “Stay here tonight, and I will bring back to you whatever word the Lord may speak to me.” So the princes of Moab stayed with Balaam. And God came to Balaam and said, “Who are these men with you?” Balaam said to God, “Balak son of Zippor, king of Moab, has sent a message to me, saying, “Look, a nation has come out of Egypt, and it covers the face of the earth. Come now and put a curse on them for me; perhaps I will be able to defeat them and drive them out.” But God said to Balaam, “You must not go with them; you must not curse the people, for they are blessed.”

- Numbers 22:1-12 NET

‘I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not close at hand.
A star will march forth out of Jacob, and a scepter will rise out of Israel.
He will crush the skulls of Moab, and the heads of all the sons of Sheth.

- Numbers 24:17 NET

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The Israelites again did evil in the Lord's sight. The Lord gave King Eglon of Moab control over Israel because they had done evil in the Lord's sight. Eglon formed alliances with the Ammonites and Amalekites. He came and defeated Israel, and they seized the City of Date Palm Trees. The Israelites were subject to King Eglon of Moab for eighteen years.

When the Israelites cried out for help to the Lord, he raised up a deliverer for them. His name was Ehud son of Gera the Benjaminite, a left-handed man. The Israelites sent him to King Eglon of Moab with their tribute payment. Ehud made himself a sword – it had two edges and was 18 inches long. He strapped it under his coat on his right thigh. He brought the tribute payment to King Eglon of Moab. (Now Eglon was a very fat man.)

After Ehud brought the tribute payment, he dismissed the people who had carried it. But he went back once he reached the carved images at Gilgal. He said to Eglon, "I have a secret message for you, O king." Eglon said, "Be quiet!" All his attendants left. When Ehud approached him, he was sitting in his well-ventilated upper room all by himself. Ehud said, "I have a message from God for you." When Eglon rose up from his seat, Ehud reached with his left hand, pulled the sword from his right thigh, and drove it into Eglon's belly. The handle went in after the blade, and the fat closed around the blade, for Ehud did not pull the sword out of his belly. As Ehud went out into the vestibule, he closed the doors of the upper room behind him and locked them.

When Ehud had left, Eglon's servants came and saw the locked doors of the upper room. They said, "He must be relieving himself in the well-ventilated inner room." They waited so long they were embarrassed, but he still did not open the doors of the upper room. Finally they took the key and opened the doors. Right before their eyes was their master, sprawled out dead on the floor! Now Ehud had escaped while they were delaying. When he passed the carved images, he escaped to Seirah.

When he reached Seirah, he blew a trumpet in the Ephraimite hill country. The Israelites went down with him from the hill country, with Ehud in the lead. He said to them, "Follow me, for the Lord is about to defeat your enemies, the Moabites!" They followed him, captured the fords of the Jordan River opposite Moab, and did not let anyone cross. That day they killed about ten thousand Moabites – all strong, capable warriors; not one escaped. Israel humiliated Moab that day, and the land had rest for eighty years.

- Judges 3:12–30 NET

[David] defeated the Moabites. He made them lie on the ground and then used a rope to measure them off. He put two-thirds of them to death and spared the other third. The Moabites became David's subjects and brought tribute.

- 2 Samuel 8:2 NET

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Sometime later Naomi's husband Elimelech died, so she and her two sons were left alone. So her sons married Moabite women. (One was named Orpah and the other Ruth.) And they continued to live there about ten years. Then Naomi's two sons, Mahlon and Kilion, also died. So the woman was left all alone – bereaved of her two children as well as her husband! So she decided to return home from the region of Moab, accompanied by her daughters-in-law, because while she was living in Moab she had heard that the Lord had shown concern for his people, reversing the famine by providing abundant crops.

But Ruth replied, “Stop urging me to abandon you! For wherever you go, I will go. Wherever you live, I will live. Your people will become my people, and your God will become my God. Wherever you die, I will die – and there I will be buried. May the Lord punish me severely if I do not keep my promise! Only death will be able to separate me from you!”

So Ruth went and gathered grain in the fields behind the harvesters. Now she just happened to end up in the portion of the field belonging to Boaz, who was from the clan of Elimelech. Now at that very moment, Boaz arrived from Bethlehem and greeted the harvesters, “May the Lord be with you!” They replied, “May the Lord bless you!” Boaz asked his servant in charge of the harvesters, “To whom does this young woman belong?” The servant in charge of the harvesters replied, “She's the young Moabite woman who came back with Naomi from the region of Moab. She asked, ‘May I follow the harvesters and gather grain among the bundles?’ Since she arrived she has been working hard from this morning until now – except for sitting in the resting hut a short time.” So Boaz said to Ruth, “Listen carefully, my dear! Do not leave to gather grain in another field. You need not go beyond the limits of this field. You may go along beside my female workers.

Then Boaz said to the leaders and all the people, “You are witnesses today that I have acquired from Naomi all that belonged to Elimelech, Kilion, and Mahlon. I have also acquired Ruth the Moabite, the wife of Mahlon, as my wife to raise up a descendant who will inherit his property so the name of the deceased might not disappear from among his relatives and from his village. You are witnesses today.” All the people who were at the gate and the elders replied, “We are witnesses. May the Lord make the woman who is entering your home like Rachel and Leah, both of whom built up the house of Israel! May you prosper in Ephrathah and become famous in Bethlehem. May your family become like the family of Perez – whom Tamar bore to Judah – through the descendants the Lord gives you by this young woman.” So Boaz married Ruth and had sexual relations with her. The Lord enabled her to conceive and she gave birth to a son. The village women said to Naomi, “May the Lord be praised because he has not

left you without a guardian today! May he become famous in Israel! He will encourage you and provide for you when you are old, for your daughter-in-law, who loves you, has given him birth. She is better to you than seven sons!” Naomi took the child and placed him on her lap; she became his caregiver. The neighbor women named him, saying, “A son has been born to Naomi.” They named him Obed. Now he became the father of Jesse— David’s father!

- Ruth 1:3–5, 2:3–8, 1:16–17, 4:9–17 NET

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