

The Book of Ruth 5 Chapter 4: A “son” for Naomi

Read Ruth, chapter 4:- In the opening verses (1 – 6), remember that Naomi and Ruth were without a “breadwinner” and that in their poverty Naomi had no choice but to sell “the parcel of land that belonged to Elimelech.” Verse 3. Boaz was able to involve the whole community because it was important that a family line should not die out and that land was not possessed by strangers. (Compare with the story of Naboth’s Vineyard in 1 Kings chapter 21 – especially verse 3). Both the alienation of land and the extinction of a family were to be prevented by the law of the “kinsman – redeemer” (“*go-el*”).

The legal witnesses; Chapter 4, verses 1 – 2:- The official meeting place for the elders was at the gate of the town. (See Deuteronomy 25, verse 7). In later Judaism ten men were considered to be a quorum for a synagogue and were also needed as a quorum for a marriage benediction. Boaz was carefully covering all the possible legalities before taking Ruth as his wife.

The legal rights and responsibilities of the ‘Next of Kin’; verses 3 – 6:- In the presence of the witnesses, Boaz asks the near relative, perhaps a brother of the late Elimelech, to redeem the land belonging to Naomi. The next of kin appears eager to do so until he realises that he will also be responsible for Ruth as a wife and that the land will, according to law become the inheritance of any children Ruth may have. In other words, he was buying the land only to give it away to a future child of Ruth. It would cost him the value of the land and thus “*impair my own inheritance*” verse 6.

Boaz accepts responsibility as ‘Kinsman Redeemer’; verses 7 – 12:- The voluntary taking off of the sandal and handing it over (verse 7) was a symbol of a transaction completed. The buying of the land from Naomi meant that she would have the value in money available for her use, and the land eventually would revert into the family line through the offspring of Ruth, widow of Naomi’s son Mahlon and daughter-in-law of Elimelech. Boaz makes a public declaration of his role as kinsman – redeemer before the whole community, gathered at the city, gates as witnesses (verses 9 – 10). “*All the people who were at the gate and the elders*” acknowledged their role as witnesses! The buying was a public event and would be part of the folk-memory of the community. Note that the community as a whole asks the blessing of the Lord God on the new marriage! (verses 11 – 12). There was a sense of communal responsibility for the welfare of Naomi and for the future well-being of the new family unit.

A son is born to Ruth and Boaz; verses 13 – 16:- The marriage was blessed of God. In characteristic Biblical teaching “*the Lord gave her conception*” (verse 13). Throughout scripture children are looked upon as a sacred trust from the Lord see Genesis 33, verse 5; Psalm 113, verse 9 and Psalm 127, verse 3. Note the contrast between Ruth chapter 1, verses 19 – 20 and here in verses 14 – 15. Naomi was now able to rejoice in that she had “*a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age*”. The relationship between Naomi and her daughter-in-law Ruth was not only blessed by the Lord God but was part of His long term plan for the redemption of the human race!

Ruth becomes an Ancestress of David and of the Lord Jesus Christ; verses 17 – 20:- The choice of a name for the baby was that of the “*women of the neighbourhood*” (verse 17) normally the naming of the child would have been the role of the father. The name Obed means “servant” so it could have been in recognition of the child’s future role in caring for Naomi in her old age!

The family tree in verses 18 – 19 is expanded in Matthew chapter 1, verses 2 to 16. In reading carefully through these verses we find the names of four women mentioned. Tamar – verse 3; Rahab – verse 5; Ruth also verse 5 and “*the wife of Uriah*”, Bathsheba – verse 6. If anyone had cause to be left out of the planning of a family tree for the coming Messiah, the King and Lord of Creation it was these four women! Tamar seduced her father-in-law (Judah) and became pregnant by him, see Genesis chapter 38. Rahab was the harlot of Jericho (see Joshua, chapter 2). Ruth was a foreigner, a Moabitess and excluded from the congregation of Israel (see Deuteronomy, chapter 23, verse 3) and Bathsheba committed adultery with King David (2 Samuel chapter 11). The Lord God in his love for all mankind excludes no-one from His plan of redemption but calls everyone to repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Remember we have a “Redeemer” in our Lord Jesus Christ and that by His blood He ransomed men for God. (Revelation chapter 5). Remember also 1 Corinthians chapter 6, verse 19 - 20!

He lives, all glory to His name!

He lives, my Jesus, still the same.

Oh, the sweet joy this sentence gives,

"I know that my Redeemer lives!"

Samuel Medley 1775