

NAOMI - RUTH CONNECTION

LESSON FORTY-TWO: RUTH 2:20

"And Naomi said unto her daughter-in-law, Blessed be he of the Lord, who hath not left off his kindness to the living and to the dead. And Naomi said unto her, The man is near of kin unto us, one of our next kinsmen."

Naomi blessed Boaz for his kindness. We saw that word "kindness" (Hebrew "hesed") in 1:8, where Naomi had entreated God to deal kindly with Ruth and Orpah for their kindness to her family. Just as Ruth had showed kindness to her husband and mother-in-law, she was treated kindly by Boaz. Coincidence? I think it's more of a natural law that God had put in motion. You will be treated the same way you treat others. If you give kindness, you will receive kindness. If you are mean, you can expect others to be mean to you. What we sow, we reap (Gal. 6:7).

Further, the Lord will reward kindness with kindness. Naomi had asked the Lord's blessing of kindness on both Ruth (1:8) and Boaz (2:20). Naomi specifies that Boaz has been kind to the living, meaning Ruth and herself, and the dead, meaning Elimelech and Mahlon.

Naomi tells Ruth that Boaz is a near kinsman. The Hebrew word for "kinsman" is "goel." It means "Kinsman-Redeemer" and is another part of the Mosaic Law designed to help the poor. The Kinsman-Redeemer can redeem land, a person, or a widow.

Canaan was conquered by the Jews and the land divided into lots that were assigned to specific families within each tribe. God instructed that the land stay in possession of the family (Lev. 25:23). However, it was allowed to sell the land temporarily if the landowner fell on hard times and needed the money. The landowner's kinsman could redeem the land by paying back the purchaser and restoring the land to the original landowner (Lev. 25:25). If there was no kinsman able and willing to buy back the land, it would be restored anyway in the year of Jubilee (Lev. 25:28).

God's laws instructs the landowners to allow the land to rest every seventh year (Lev. 25:3-4). Crops may be grown for six years but in the seventh year there will be a "Sabbath of rest" (Lev. 25:4). This will occur for a cycle of seven Sabbaths, or 49 years (7 periods of 7). The year following, that is, the 50th year, is the year of Jubilee. In that year, all land that was sold must be returned to the original landowner (Lev. 25:10). Consequently, a purchaser would calculate how many years until Jubilee and would pro-rate the payment to the landowner.

Naomi knew the law. As a near kinsman Boaz could purchase back Elimelech's land if he was willing to act as the kinsman-redeemer. Since Elimelech died before his sons, Ruth's husband Mahlon, being the oldest son, would have inherited the land. But Mahlon died and he did not leave an heir.

This brings us to the Levirate Law. If a man dies without an heir, his brother can marry his widow (if that brother isn't already married) and their first child will be the heir to the first brother's estate (Deut. 25:5-6). If there is no brother, a near kinsman can act as the "levir," or "brother-in-law."

Thus, if he is able (not already married) and willing, Boaz could perform the duties of the Kinsman-Redeemer and purchase back Mahlon's land, marry Mahlon's widow, and (hopefully) produce an heir so that the family of Elimelech and Mahlon does not cease. Naomi understood all this. She saw how kind

Boaz had been to Ruth and probably suspected that he had taken a romantic interest in her. Naomi began to plan for Ruth's future.

God's laws and commandments are given for our own good. The Bible is like an instruction manual on God's greatest creation: man. Search the manual for answers to your questions about any part of your life. Some answers are in black and white. Others may come in the form of a principle to apply. Sometimes insights come from reading about the experiences of the people like Naomi and Ruth. If there is something bothering you or something you don't understand, dig in. He will supply your answer.

"How sweet are thy words unto my taste! yea, sweeter than honey to the mouth. Through the precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way." Psalm 119:103-104