

NAOMI - RUTH CONNECTION

LESSON SEVENTY-FIVE: RUTH 4:16

"And Naomi took the child, and laid it in her bosom, and became nurse unto it."

Verse 16 has been interpreted several different ways by a variety of commentators. Perhaps part of the problem is the broad range of meanings possible for the Hebrew word translated "nurse." This word means "to build or support; to foster as a parent or nurse; to bring up." What was the relationship between Naomi and the child Obed?

One theory is that Naomi legally adopted Obed. That seems unlikely. He was already her legal heir so adoption wasn't necessary. Also, the genealogy of Jesus records Ruth as the mother of Obed, not Naomi (Mt. 1:5).

Similar theories suggest Naomi was recognized as Obed's mother. Or, because Naomi was past childbearing age Ruth had the baby for her, as a kind of surrogate. Again, why? Naomi was the legal grandmother and Obed was her heir. What would be the advantage of altering that relationship to mother-son status? Obed was also Boaz's heir as his eldest son (assuming that there were more children) or his only son.

Other commentators suggest Naomi raised Obed. While some theories credit Naomi with the primary responsibility of raising Obed while Ruth was apparently not involved at all, this does not seem likely. Considering the close relationship Naomi and Ruth enjoyed it is much more likely that they raised Obed together.

The Bible doesn't state specifically that Naomi lived with Ruth and Boaz, but it would make sense that she would do so. Boaz was the nearest kinsman willing to assume responsibility for Naomi. When Obed was born, Ruth and Boaz had a built-in nanny right on the premises.

The function of a "nurse" in Biblical times was that of a nanny while the child was young and a governess/mentor or companion-teacher in later years. Usually, the nurse was a servant in the household of the well-to-do. But she was a high-ranking servant since she had the charge of the children of the household. Rebekah, for example, took her nurse Deborah with her when she left her parents' home and traveled with Abraham's servant to meet her husband-to-be Isaac (Gen. 24:59). Deborah served as a chaperone to Rebekah on the trip. She remained with Rebekah for the rest of her life, probably serving as nurse to Rebekah's twins, Jacob and Esau (Gen. 35:8).

Naomi was not a servant, of course, but a treasured member of the family. She may have felt it was her obligation to assist in any way she could. She certainly had a special relationship with the infant. Thus, she would have been eager to take a hand in his care and training. Naomi could have instructed Obed in Hebrew culture, Israeli history, and the Mosaic Law. She probably taught him the history of Elimelech's family, the legacy of which he was the heir.

Sometimes we find ourselves in the position of a mentor or teacher. This is one of the reasons we endure trials: so that we can be an example to someone else. Have you found your own knowledge and experiences have enabled you to help someone else with his or her present troubles?

*"The Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon him, to all that call upon him in truth. He will fulfill the desire of them that fear him: he also will hear their cry, and will save them."
Psalm 145:18-19*