

NAOMI - RUTH CONNECTION

LESSON SIXTY-NINE: RUTH 4:11c

"And do thou worthily in Ephrathah, and be famous in Bethlehem."

The people of Bethlehem, who witnessed Boaz fulfilling the role of Kinsman-Redeemer for Naomi and Ruth, continued with the second part of their three-part blessing. The first part of the blessing was for the bride, Ruth, to be as fruitful as Rachel and Leah, who founded the nation of Israel. The second part of the blessing was for the groom, Boaz, to do worthily and be famous in their hometown.

First, let me clear up the location. Ephrathah, which is sometimes spelled "Ephrath," is another name for Bethlehem: speaking of Rachel, Jacob said, "... and I buried her there in the way of Ephrath; the same is Bethlehem" (Gen. 48:7). Bethlehem was probably founded by, and named after, the four-times great grandson of Judah (I Chron. 2:51). Judah's grandson Caleb (not the Caleb that Moses sent to spy out the land of Canaan) married Ephrath, whose name is sometimes spelled "Ephrathah" (I Chron. 2:19). Ephrath/Ephrathah was the great-grandmother of Bethlehem (I Chron. 2:50-51). The town, then, was named after Judah's descendants.

The blessing on Boaz had two parts. First, that he would "do thou worthily in Ephrathah." The Hebrew word "hayil" translated "worthily" here means "a force (of men, means, other resources)." The word is variously translated "wealth, virtue, valor, strength, worthy, might, power, riches." The blessing on Boaz, then, would be that he would prove to be a man of strength, power, and wealth. He would be a mighty man, a leader in their town.

The second part of the blessing was that he would "be famous in Bethlehem." The Hebrew word translated "famous" means "honor, authority, character." The blessed Boaz would become known in the community as a man of good character, an honorable man.

The two-fold blessing ensures a good life for the bride-to-be. As the wife of a wealthy and powerful man of good character, Ruth would be able to enjoy good standing in the community, a prosperous lifestyle, and spend the rest of her life with a companion who was thoughtful, upright, and dependable. If the groom were blessed with riches and power but did not possess a good character he would likely misuse his power, be greedy and selfish. On the other hand, if the groom were a man of good character but he had not attained wealth or power, Ruth would still have a good life. She just would not have the luxury and community standing a wealthy or powerful husband could provide. A twice-blessed husband was Ruth's reward for her faithful service to Naomi.

Power and wealth are external. They are goals that men may strive for. But good character is internal. Grief, sorrow, loss can strip away that false veneer and reveal the true self. It's too exhausting to maintain a false front for any length of time. How we respond to trials shows who we really are. Affliction builds character if we use it as an opportunity to learn and grow (James 1:2-5; Rom. 5:3-5). What kind of person are you?

"A gracious woman retaineth honor; and strong men retain riches." Proverbs 11:16