

NAOMI - RUTH CONNECTION

LESSON SIXTY-EIGHT: RUTH 4:11b

"The Lord make the woman that is come into thine house like Rachel and like Leah, which two did build the house of Israel."

The ten elders and all the people that gathered together at Bethlehem's gate witnessed the nearer kinsman relinquishing his claim to redeem Elimelech's family's land and Mahlon's widow Ruth. The nearer kinsman sealed the contract by taking off his sandal and handing it to Boaz. Then Boaz announced his intention to redeem the land for Naomi and to marry the widow Ruth.

It appears that the people of Bethlehem are a close-knit group of individuals. Everybody knows everyone else's business. And they care about each other like the extended family that they are. Bethlehem is located in the area of Israel that was allotted to the tribe of Judah. The people are all kinsmen in one degree or another, being descended from Jacob and Leah's son Judah.

These people have observed Ruth's loving care of her mother-in-law Naomi. They witnessed her hard at work in the fields gleaning barley. It seems that they looked on with favor at her budding romance with one of their leading citizens. Ruth had earned the respect and affection of the people of Bethlehem.

Thus Boaz's announcement of his impending marriage met with the approval of the witnesses. And they immediately pronounced a three-fold blessing on the happy couple and their (future) children. The first part of the blessing was for Ruth to be as fruitful as Jacob's wives Leah and Rachel. Jacob, who God renamed Israel, was the progenitor of the nation called after his name. His twelve sons settled the land God had promised to Abraham and his descendants.

The story of how Jacob met Rachel is recorded in Genesis 29. He loved her so much he was willing to work for her father for free seven years so that he could marry her. Seven years later, Jacob consummates his marriage. And, wakes up the next morning beside Rachel's sister Leah (Gen. 29:25). Oops! Wrong bride. Rachel and Leah's father had deceived Jacob. The good news is that Jacob also got to marry Rachel, too (Gen. 29:28).

Rachel and Leah did not have a happy home life. Jacob loved Rachel, which made Leah jealous of her sister. But it was Leah who gave Jacob six sons and one daughter. Initially barren, jealous Rachel watched as her sister gave birth to one baby after another. Their rivalry in the "Baby Wars" is documented in Genesis 29-30. Ultimately, Rachel and Leah (and their maids) produced twelve sons, who became the heads of the twelve tribes of Israel.

God used them where they were in spite of their personal problems. He used them to found a nation that would be an example to all other nations what it means to belong to the Living God. He used them to document His words and works in permanent written form. And He used them to bring His Son into the world to complete His Plan of Redemption.

He can use us, too, where we are, in spite of our circumstances. Or, even because of them. Who knows? Perhaps He is using your personal situation to strengthen your faith, teach you how to cope,

and give you compassion and insight into another's suffering. Embrace the wisdom you have gained by enduring your own trials. And look for opportunities to use you hard-earned knowledge to help others.

"Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding." Proverbs 3:13