

SERIES: BOOK OF RUTH
“Celebration“
Ruth 4: 13-17

A great guy has said many times “use every occasion you can to celebrate” and “we should celebrate our birthday for a week before and a week after, at least.” [Me] *Celebrations*, done right, are a lot of fun! In the NASB the word “celebrate” occurs 52 times. The first 16 times come from Moses instructing the people to celebrate the Passover and other feasts to remember the deliverance of the LORD. The next dozen or so times *celebration* is mentioned is during the reign of King David. He celebrated before the LORD on numerous occasions. The prophets then reminded the people over and over during the apostasy of the Kings to *celebrate* the Passover and remember the LORD. Then after the captivity when Nehemiah rebuilt the wall around Jerusalem he led the people in big *celebrations*. In the NT four times the word *celebrate* is used in the story of the return of the prodigal son (Luke 15). Paul admonishes us in 1 Corinthians 5:8 (NASB95) ⁸ *Therefore let us celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.*” Our biblical text for today from the book of Ruth has *celebration* written all over it. Turn with me to Ruth 4:13-17.

In order to appreciate the joy of today’s text, we need to remember how this story started. Listen to the moaning of chapter 1. Ruth 1:19-22 (NET)

¹⁹ *So the two of them [Naomi and Ruth] journeyed together until they arrived in Bethlehem. When they entered Bethlehem, the whole village was excited about their arrival. The women of the village said, “Can this be Naomi?”* ²⁰ *But she replied to them, “Don’t call me ‘Naomi’! Call me ‘Mara’ because the Sovereign One has treated me very harshly.* ²¹ *I left here full, but the LORD has caused me to return empty-handed. Why do you call me ‘Naomi,’ seeing that the LORD has opposed me, and the Sovereign One has caused me to suffer?”* ²² *So Naomi returned, accompanied by her Moabite daughter-in-law Ruth, who came back with her from the region of Moab. (Now they arrived in Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest.)*¹

Several months have been worked through. A lot has happened. Eyes have met. Attraction has turned to admiration. Curiosity has morphed into courtship. The concept of a Levirate relationship has convened into a marriage contract. The potential has become the actual. Barrenness has given way to fruitfulness. Sadness has turned into singing. Emptiness has been filled to overflowing. Darkness of soul has dawned into a dayspring of delight. Mara has become Naomi. Or in terms of a parallel NT event, Friday has become Sunday!

The story of Boaz, Ruth, and Naomi concludes with a glorious resolution of a fundamental issue in the book: the filling of Naomi’s emptiness and the birth of a son through whom the royal line of David will eventually appear. Unlike the formal court scene in the gate, the climax of the story occurs in the home of Boaz and Ruth at least nine months later. The account divides into² three parts. Each part is a *celebration*. There is the celebration of a wedding, a birth, and rescued old age. Let’s look at them.

¹ Biblical Studies Press: *The NET Bible First Edition; Bible. English. NET Bible.; The NET Bible*. Biblical Studies Press, 2006; 2006

²Block, Daniel Isaac: *Judges, Ruth*. electronic ed. Nashville : Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001, c1999 (Logos Library System; The New American Commentary 6), S. 725

I. THE CELEBRATION OF A WEDDING, 13a.

So Boaz took Ruth, and she became his wife, and he went to her. . . .

Following the spontaneous and enthusiastic pronouncement of the blessing upon this union, vs. 11-12, we come without further emotion to the announcement of the basic facts of any Israelite marriage, noting the roles of each of the participants in the event.

First, Boaz married Ruth. According to the Hebrew idiom he **took** her and she became his wife. The expression is typically ancient Near Eastern and biblical, inasmuch as the responsibility for the establishment and maintenance of the household rested on the man's shoulders. The idiom also reflects the specific custom of the man taking (*lāqah*) his wife to his house as part of the marriage ritual (Deut 20:7).

Second, Ruth became a wife. In "becoming his wife" Ruth's social progression is completed. She had graduated from the status of *nokriyyā*, "foreigner" (2:10), to *šiph ā*, "lowest servant" (2:13), to *āmā*, "maidservant" (3:9), and now to *iššā*, "wife." Naomi's forgotten prayer, "may the LORD grant that you may find rest, each in the house of her husband" (1:9), has been answered fully and completely.

Third, they consummated the marriage. Having married Ruth, Boaz "went to her". Again, let me emphasize, they did these things in the right order! This is the common Hebrew expression for the consummation of a marriage through sexual intercourse. . . . The idiom actually reflects the entrance of a man into the tent or bride chamber of his wife for the purpose of intercourse.^{69 3} Because of Boaz' prominence in Bethlehem and the enthusiastic response at the city gate, I assume their must have been a huge wedding celebration. But in the compression of the story and for the economy of words, the author didn't mention this fluffy detail. "Just the facts, sir, just the facts!" The text just moves on to the next fact.

II. THE CELEBRATION OF A BIRTH, 13b-15

¹³ . . . And the LORD enabled her to conceive, and she gave birth to a son. ¹⁴ Then the women said to Naomi, "Blessed is the LORD who has not left you without a redeemer today, and may his name become famous in Israel. ¹⁵ "May he also be to you a restorer of life and a sustainer of your old age; for your daughter-in-law, who loves you and is better to you than seven sons, has given birth to him."

The last part of verse 13 telescopes nine months of personal history. It sounds like a honeymoon pregnancy. The fruitfulness of Ruth is given as a direct result of the blessing of the LORD. After years of a "closed womb" "the LORD enabled her to conceive". A literal rendering is "the LORD gave her [Ruth] conception". This is only the second time in the book where the narrator has God as a subject of a verb (cf. 1:6), but how significant is this statement! The expression *hērāyôn*, "conception, pregnancy," occurs in only two other Old Testament texts: Gen 3:16 [To the woman He said, "I will greatly multiply Your pain in childbirth, . . ."] and Hos 9:11 [As for Ephraim, their glory will fly away like a bird— No birth, no pregnancy and no conception!]. But the present idiom, "to grant/give conception," is unique. This statement must be interpreted against the backdrop of Ruth's apparently ten-year marriage with Mahlon, for whom she seems to have been unable to conceive. Now, in fulfillment of the prayer of the witnesses in the gate (vv. 11–12), Yahweh graciously grants Ruth pregnancy as a gift. This is the

⁶⁹ E.g., Gen 30:3–4; 39:14, 17; Judg 15:1; 2 Sam 12:24; 17:25; Prov 2:19. For further references see *DCH* 1.113.

³ Block, Daniel Isaac: *Judges, Ruth*. electronic ed. Nashville : Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001, c1999 (Logos Library System; The New American Commentary 6), S. 725

author's modest way of identifying a miracle; she who had been unable to bear a child for Mahlon has conceived for Boaz.

One author wrote: Ruth “gave birth to a son.” She did her part as well, carrying the child to full term, and then delivering a son.⁷⁰ . . . Ultimately the royal line is preserved because two pious human beings and Yahweh act in consort for the achievement of his purpose.⁴

After the birth of this son, the women have a “grandma party” for Naomi. In their “sharing” time notice the things they say to her:

- **Blessed is the LORD.** They acknowledge God’s involvement in this process and give Him praise for bringing about this conception and birth. Here we see the faithfulness of God.

From here on their statements focus on the child and the role he has in Naomi’s life:

- **Who has not left you without a redeemer today.** This child becomes the closest relative [goel] who guarantees the long-term safety and security of Naomi. That which a son was supposed to provide for his mother is being supplied by this grandson.
- **May he become famous in Israel.** Literally this is, “may his name be called in Israel” and is an idiom that means to be known and remembered long after the person has lived. The name David is a clear illustration of this idiom. Just the mention of the name even today brings recognition of him and his exploits. These ladies wanted the same thing for this lad. Obed is not quite to the same level as David, unless you know David’s family line. But the more notoriety, fame, wealth, and renown this one would have, would definitely mean he would have the means to provide for Naomi as long as she lives. They were placing a blessing on him for her sake.
- **May he be to you a restorer of life.** These ladies are great! They remember how distraught Naomi was when she came back to Bethlehem. Naomi had cried, “**the LORD has brought me back empty**” and now they use the same word translated as “restorer” (brought back) to life to show how God has filled the emptiness she felt not very long ago. Grandchildren can have that affect on grandparents! When the grandchildren come, it seems many grandparents get a new lease on life, get a new interest in life, and get a new participation in life. Some grandparents begin doing things they never did or maybe had no time to do as parents. The new life of a child begets restored life in the elderly.
- **May he be a sustainer of your old age.** The moment this boy arrived he began filling up her life, supplying a new outlet for her emotional love, and a new focus for all her attention. He brought relief to her fear. He buoyed her sagging spirit. He validated her old age. She now had someone to care for as well as someone who would eventually care for her. With such blessing they were encouraging her to celebrate the goodness of her LORD.
- **For your daughter-in-law. . .** But the women’s last statement is the most remarkable of all. In the beginning Naomi had bitterly accused God of emptying her life by robbing her of her husband and her two sons. But now the women console her: she may have lost her sons, but she has gained a daughter-in-law. And what a daughter-in-law Ruth is! **First,**

⁷⁰The verb רָגַע is used in the *qal* stem when a woman is the subject; the *hiphil* is used if a man is the subject. Cf. the following genealogy.

⁴Block, Daniel Isaac: *Judges, Ruth*. electronic ed. Nashville : Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001, c1999 (Logos Library System; The New American Commentary 6), S. 725

Ruth loves Naomi. In fact, in her action we observe one of the most dramatic demonstrations of the meaning of the Hebrew word for “love,” *āhēb*. Whereas modern definitions of love tend to view the word as an emotional term, in the Old Testament love is fundamentally an expression of covenant commitment, the kind of devotion to which Ruth had given such eloquent verbal expression in 1:16–17. But “love” is not demonstrated primarily in words; it is expressed in acts of *h'esed*, placing the welfare of the other ahead of oneself. In fact, more than anyone else in the history of Israel, Ruth embodies the fundamental principle of the nation’s ethic: “You shall love your God with all your heart” (Deut 6:5) “and your neighbor as yourself” (Lev 19:18). In Lev 19:34 Moses instructs the Israelites to love the stranger as they love themselves. Ironically, it is this stranger from Moab who shows the Israelites what this means.

Second, Ruth has given birth to the *gō. ēl*. On the surface this may not seem so remarkable, but when one considers that she had been married to Mahlon for ten years but had borne no children for him, the significance of the statement becomes evident. The barren womb has been opened. The next of kin has been born.

Third, Ruth is better for Naomi than seven sons. The reference to “seven sons” is conventional, reflecting the ancient Israelite view that the ideal family consisted of seven sons. This is an amazing affirmation of the character of Ruth. All Bethlehem knew she was a noble woman (3:11), but these women place her value above seven sons; what extraordinary compensation for the two sons Naomi had lost!⁵

So this granny party was a celebration of the birth of this grandson. These women were more excited than Naomi. They gathered around her and had a celebration for the boy. But they went on to celebrate about Naomi as well. This brings us to the third celebration.

III. THE CELEBRATION OF OLD AGE, 16-17.

¹⁶Then Naomi took the child and laid him in her lap, and became his nurse. ¹⁷The neighbor women gave him a name, saying, “A son has been born to Naomi!” So they named him Obed. He is the father of Jesse, the father of David.

When I read that she took the child and laid him in her lap, I got a mental picture of my dad after his retirement because he did that very thing with his grand and great-grand children that were born in Boise. [Our kids missed out on that.] As each one arrived, Dad would take them as soon as they came home from the hospital and place them in his lap and “they were his”. He “raised” each new baby that way. He bonded with each one and there has always been a mighty bond between the child and the elderly one. So it was with Naomi and this new little guy! She took him and cared for him. How blessed Ruth was to have that kind of help! How blessed this little guy was to have that kind of care and love! It is still happening today because many grandparents are raising their grandchildren, but usually for a different reason.

There are very few things to celebrate about old age, but here is one. Whatever you can find to celebrate, do it!

Naomi’s celebration of old age is expressed in three verbs: she **took**; she **laid** ; she **became**. Her world had changed from famine, barrenness, and death to family, fruitfulness, and fun. She now had a new face, a new focus, and a new function. She was a nanny! Here the expression denotes

⁵Block, Daniel Isaac: *Judges, Ruth*. electronic ed. Nashville : Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001, c1999 (Logos Library System; The New American Commentary 6), S. 728

a guardian, “nanny” in the true sense.⁸⁵ Naomi found that “the capacity to care is the thing which gives life its deepest significance.”⁶

There are several interesting things about v. 17. **First**, these women stayed involved with these lives. Notice they are called “neighbor women” now, not just “the women” (v. 14). **Second**, this is the only place in the Old Testament where females (other than the mother) are said to be present at the naming event.⁷ **Third**, the “naming event” is a public celebration. Twice in quick succession they called for his naming. The redundancy emphasizes its significance. **Fourth**, the form is a very traditional birth announcement: “a son has been born”. This is the equivalent of our announcements “It’s a boy/girl!” **Fifth**, the name Obed is the short form of Obadiah (One who serves the LORD). At least a dozen men in the OT are named Obadiah. Maybe these folks were thinking if we name him Obadiah people will shorten it to Obed, so why not just give him the shortened version to start with. So they did. There are only 5 men in the OT referred to as Obed. This one is the best known. “This son is Naomi’s redeemer, the one who has come to serve her by restoring her life and offering her security in her old age”.⁸ He has given her reason to celebrate her old age!

IV. A FEW INSIGHTS FROM THIS PASSAGE.

1. Celebrate major events in life. Use every occasion you can to celebrate. This keeps the fun in life.
2. At whatever age, find something that has the power to pull you into your future. For Naomi it was a grandchild. It is different things at different ages, but we always need a reason to get out of bed in the morning. Find it and follow it!
3. Stay involved with people and things as long as possible. This gives meaning and even significance to your life.
4. Keep mixing the generations. The young add passion and the elders add perspective. Keep a good mix and both will stay balanced.
5. Watch for answers to prayer. Sometimes it takes a while for answer to get delivered. We so often pray a disheartened “Friday” prayer [“woe is me!” Naomi in chapter 1] and forget to connect it to a delightful “Sunday” answer. [Obed is born.]
6. Remember the LORD when you celebrate. He has been involved through all the experiences of life leading up to the moment. Include Him in the celebration “Blessed is the LORD who has not left you without....” Every Sunday morning we gather here to celebrate the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. Invite others to come celebrate with us!

⁸⁵ Assuming “nanny” to be an affectionate diminutive expression for Grandmother/Grandma.

⁶ Pablo Casals, quoted in *Great Quotes & Illustrations*, compiled by George Sweeting, Waco: Word Books, p. 39.

⁷Block, Daniel Isaac: *Judges, Ruth*. electronic ed. Nashville : Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001, c1999 (Logos Library System; The New American Commentary 6), S. 730

⁸Block, Daniel Isaac: *Judges, Ruth*. electronic ed. Nashville : Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001, c1999 (Logos Library System; The New American Commentary 6), S. 732

7. And finally, celebrate something every day. Even if it is just because you are alive, celebrate!

Now may: The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. 2 Corinthians 13:14 (NASB95) Amen.