

## THE FULFILLMENT OF HOPE

One of the most powerful forces in a person's life is HOPE. When I use the word HOPE I am not talking about wishful thinking but rather a confident expectation. When we have such expectation, then we, either consciously or subconsciously, do things that will give high probability to the expectation happening. I have a hope of living to be over 120 year old and be mentally sharp, in good health and vigorous everyday of my life. Because I have that hope, I will avoid doing certain things and avoid eating certain things that would lower my probability of success. I will avoid getting upset and emotionally overwrought, avoid foods high in fat, avoid alcohol and tobacco. In addition, I will actively do things that will increase my probability of success. Such things as exercising regularly to help my body, eating what is good for me (such as yogurt), reading stimulating material to exercise my mind, and keeping the spiritual life healthy (if that same Spirit that raised Christ from the dead dwell in you, He shall quicken your mortal bodies). If I had hope of one day owning a Rolls-Royce, then I would be saving money for that purpose and would be on the look out for a good deal on a Rolls (if such deals exist). The point is that HOPE drives our lives to a great extent. It gives direction to what we do on an everyday basis. If we have no hope, then we probably don't have much direction in our lives.

In our continuing study of Ruth and her mother-in-law Naomi, we see what hope did to influence the lives of these two women. Naomi returned to Israel so that she might be near her relatives. In that society, there was a moral, if not legal, responsibility to take care of ones relatives. With women having little or no rights, it was important that she and Ruth find a male relative to represent them as an advocate. In Israel their real estate laws were very different from the way we operate: land could not pass out of the family on a permanent basis. If people needed to "sell" property because of hard times, then there was an obligation of a relative to buy the land.

There was an additional hope factor at work here and that centered around the raising up of an offspring or heir to the line of Elimelech. You recall that both his son died without leaving any children and there was no heir to carry on the family name. This was quite serious in that society. Children were also the only form of Social Security that they had in that day. Parents took care of their children when they were young – that is a natural expectation – and children took care of their parents when the parents became old and that was just as natural an expectation as parents caring for their young. Our society today has lost the sense obligation to care for aging parents and we even see evidence of some parents that do not have a sense of obligation to care for their children. (This is perhaps what Paul meant when he said that in the last days people would be without natural affection.) You recall how Naomi had Ruth go and work in the fields being longed for a person that would be eligible to be a husband to Ruth. Because of the expectation that Ruth would get married and have children, Naomi was influenced in her choices of where Ruth was to gather grain. This relative was Boaz and he was willing to help Naomi and Ruth fulfill their hope. However, there were some legal barriers that had to be removed before the hope could be fulfilled. By law, the closest relative had the right of first refusal to buy the land that belonged to Elimelech. He was an older man and when he was approached about buying the land of Elimelech he was willing to take on that responsibility. However, when he was reminded that caring for Naomi and marrying Ruth (to raise up an heir to Mahlon) was part of the deal, then he was not so eager to take on that responsibility. When Boaz was willing to take the responsibility, the nearest

relative was probably quite relieved. Boaz arranged to meet the older relative at the city gate (would be the equivalent to the court house today) and the right to buy the land and marry the younger women would be legally transferred to Boaz. They met at the city gate because there would be witnesses there.

RUTH 4:9-10 After the encounter with the older relative of Naomi's and his refusal to exercise his option, then Boaz declared his intent in front of the witnesses. He took the responsibility for all the land and possession of Elimelech and that which would go to his two sons, all of which were now deceased. He also took on the responsibility of Ruth the wife of Mahlon and to raise up children to perpetuate the name of that family. Notice that the reason given was that the "name of the dead be not cut off from among his brethren". This preoccupation with preserving the name of a person may have been related to their idea of what "eternal life" was all about in that day and time.

RUTH 4:11-12 This was a time of rejoicing for all those there that witnessed the transaction. There was a call for the blessing of God to be upon this union. Notice what was important to these people. First that there be a large family. The reference to Rachael and Leah recalls the fact that they and their handmaids bore 12 children to Jacob which grew into the nation of Israel. Part of this desire for a large family had to do with economics in the agricultural economy that they were in. Also, as was mentioned earlier, children were security for the ageing. Second, there was the importance of having a good name, or as they put it to be famous at least in his home town. The reference to Pharez and Tamar recalls the fact that foreign women had been taken as wives before by their ancestors and the results had worked out OK.

Our values have changed somewhat in this day and age. To have a very large family is thought to be irresponsible by some people. Many are concerned about the earth being overpopulated and there not being enough food. I really don't think that we have a lot to worry about. Another change is that in many instances, children do not take care of their parents in their later years. I remember reading in about an elderly gentleman that celebrated his 91st birthday by waiting all day long for some of his children to come see him. All of his children lived within five miles of the rooming house where he lived. He waited all day and not one of the children came. Times have really changed. The importance of a good name is not as highly esteemed as it once was. I think that this is a change for the worse in our culture. The society in which Boaz lived was one in which marriage outside of one's nationality and religion was uncommon. Nowadays when young people get married the place of commonality of religious beliefs is not high on the agenda. For non-Christians, this is understandable. However, for Christian youth, it is a formula for grief and sadness.

RUTH 4:13-17 The community of support seems to be focused toward Naomi. She was the person most at risk in the society in which she lived and the child that was born to Boaz and Ruth represented security and preservation of the family name. There is also recognition of the devotion of Ruth to Naomi. This type of care of one person for another is commendable and God blesses those relationships with fulfilled hope.