

THE GIFT OF PROGENY

by Rabbi Dr. Meir Levin

And Hashem gave Ruth a pregnancy and she gave birth to a child (4:13)

The pregnancy was granted by God. It is described as a gift with an expression that is unique in the Tanach. Apparently something was very unusual about this pregnancy for it is introduced in quiet and unusual manner. This language drew the attention of our Sages who make a striking comment: "Ruth did not have a uterus and the Holy One Blessed be He etched out a uterus within her (Ruth Rabbah 7:14)". Before them the Sages saw the precedent of Rachel and Leah, to whom Ruth was compared but a few lines earlier, both of whom were barren. Of Rachel it says, "and Rachel was barren (Gen. 29:31)". Of Leah, they commented on the same verse: "And God saw that Leah was hated and He opened her womb" - this teaches us that Leah was barren (Pesikta DRav Kahana 20:6).

It is curious, is it not, that the Matriarchs could not produce progeny in a natural way. It is almost as if the beginning of the Jewish people had to come forth in an act of miraculous new creation. So also the Davidic line - it was not simply descended from Boaz and Ruth but a direct new creation of the Almighty. As such it represented a novel chapter in human history and not simply a continuation of the past.

However, Ruth's pregnancy represented something even bigger. It stood for the entire process of the dark exile, the night of human history, when oppression, suffering, falsehood and bestiality fill the earth, but also the time within which germinate, sprout and grow the seeds of Redemption.

"The angel appointed over pregnancy, his name is "Night". He takes the drop and stands it up in front of the Holy One Blessed Be He (Niddah 16b). "The exile is compared to pregnancy and the messianic redemption - to birth, as it writes, "For Zion labored, also gave birth to her sons (Isaiah 66:8) ". (Torah Ohr Vayera 55a).

We have previously cited the amazing insight of R. Tsadok of Lublin who observed that the Jewish nation had to have started in childlessness, barrenness and despair. Only a nation that sprung from men and women who could hope, labor and trust when there appeared to be no hope, can persevere and survive in the long bitter night of exile, may it come to an end speedily and in our day. What we read here is that Ruth's optimism, faith and hope was finally rewarded. So also we must pray, hope and never, never despair as we await deliverance. It is this exegetical thread that may have led the Rokeach in his commentary to offer the following allegorical explanation of our verse.

"And Boaz took Ruth" - This alludes to Israel, that the Holy One Blessed Be He, will return to

Jerusalem and will desire to bring Himself closer to the Congregation of Israel. And God will give Zion pregnancy and she will give birth.... for "Zion labored and gave birth to her children (Isaiah 66:8). This is: "And she (Ruth) gave birth to a son" - son alludes to Israel or the Messiah. The Hebrew word "will give birth" has the numerical value of Messiah the son of David".

Soon, speedily, in our day.

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