

THRU THE BIBLE EXPOSITION

Judges And Ruth: Personal Blessing Amid Group Apostasy

Part IV: The Book Of Ruth - An Example Of God's Individual Blessing Amid Group Apostasy

B. Practical Functioning For God's Blessing In A World Of Great Darkness

(Ruth 2:1-23)

Introduction: (To show the need . . .)

Though we learned from Ruth 1 to heed the literal, grammatical and historical interpretation of Scripture for blessing in a dark world, we may wonder how to do so in **practical** terms due to the hardships the darkness presents:

(1) For example, The Wall Street Journal, June 26, 2015, p. A13 editorial, "Antonin Scalia Dissents" cited excerpts from Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia's dissenting opinion in the ObamaCare case King v. Burwell as follows: "The Court holds that when the . . . Affordable Care Act says 'Exchange established by the State' it means 'Exchange established by the State or the Federal Government.' That is of course quite absurd . . . Words no longer have meaning if an Exchange that is *not* established by a State is 'established by the State' . . . (T)he Supreme Court . . . favors some laws over others, and is prepared to do whatever it takes to uphold and assist its favorites."

One may wonder how to function in a world where the nation's highest court changes the meanings of words.

(2) Local spiritual darkness makes life difficult, too: we just got a letter from a missionary that cited the late Roman Catholic nun, Mother Theresa as saying: "God speaks in the silence of the heart. Listening is the beginning of prayer." The missionary supported her saying, adding: "I trust it will encourage you to really listen to God as you pray." Yet, that is errant mysticism: God spoke to us in Scripture all the revelation we need (2 Timothy 3:16-17), so He does not now speak to us by prayer! If reputable believers tout errant mysticism, we may wonder how to function.

Need: *So we ask, "What practical guidance would God have for us to enjoy His blessing in a world of darkness?!"*

- I. **When Ruth arrived in Bethlehem of Judah with her mother-in-law Naomi in the era of the judges, she faced a world of dangerous darkness coupled with the need to address that world in a practical way:**
 - A. In their male-dominated culture, widows like Ruth and Naomi (Ruth 1:1-5) had no legal means of support, and were dependent as to livelihood and safety on the charitable goodness of the people around them.
 - B. Yet, the Judges 19 concubine atrocity occurred in their area in their time, meaning these widows were at risk.
 - C. The Mosaic Law provided for the needy like Ruth and Naomi to glean after harvesters for food, and it was the start of barley harvest (Ruth 1:22), but gleaning meant working in the open fields, what put them in danger.
 - D. So, Ruth and Naomi needed a **practical** plan for safely making a living in a spiritually dark, dangerous world.
- II. **Ruth then formed a wise, PRACTICAL plan for meeting the livelihood needs of Naomi and herself:**
 - A. Step One: Ruth took the **initiative**, devising and telling Naomi of a plan to meet their livelihood needs, v. 2a.
 - B. Step Two: Ruth functioned in God's **chain-of-command**, getting the permission of Naomi, her superior, v. 2b: Ruth's words, "Let me now go" (KJV) adds the particle of entreaty, *na'* to the verb "go" (*halak*, Kittel, Bib. Heb., p. 1196; B. D. B., A Heb.-Eng. Lex. of the O. T., p. 609; 229-237) spoken in the imperfect tense as a jussive [*'elkah-na'*], and it translates, "**Please [you] let me go,**" so Ruth heeded God's chain-of-command in asking permission of her elder and culturally superior relative, her mother-in-law, Naomi.
 - C. Step Three: Ruth **prudently** formed a wise plan by combining a literal Scripture directive with common sense:
 1. Leviticus 23:22a told Israel's farmers not to reap the corners of their fields, leaving them for the poor, but were Ruth to glean in a corner of a field without any male protector, she would expose herself to predators.
 2. However, the last part of that verse also told farmers that they were to leave the gleanings in the midst of field where they worked for the poor! Ruth also knew that harvest teams were composed of male servants who cut the grain followed closely by female servants under their guard who gathered the cuttings to bind them in sheaves (Guthrie & Motyer, The New Bib. Com.: Rev., 1970, p. 280), so she reasoned that if she obtained permission from a harvest team foreman to glean close behind his team's female servants as she heeded Leviticus 23:22b, she could gain some protection while gleaning, and Naomi agreed, Ruth 2:2c!
 - D. Step Four: Ruth worked **industriously**, gleaning long and hard to lessen her danger and boost her yield, 2:7b.
- III. **God then aided Ruth's practical efforts both supernaturally and through His servant Boaz, Ruth 2:3-23:**
 - A. As Ruth went forth to glean, God led her to select the right **field** and even the right **strip** of that field, 2:1, 3:
 1. Naomi had a kinsman, a "mighty [*gibbor*] nobleman [*ish*] of valor, worth, ability[*hayil*]" (B. K. C., O. T., p. 422, 425; R. Girdlestone, Syns. of the O. T., 1973, p. 48-50) who owned a **strip** of a field, Ruth 2:1, 3c. [The field was divided into **strips** by boundary stones, and Boaz owned a **strip**, Ibid., Guthrie & Motyer.]

2. Ruth's "hap was to light on" Boaz's **strip** of a field among various grain fields and their many strips (v. 3b KJV). Literally "her chance [*migreha*] chanced upon [*wayiqer*]" (Ibid., Kittel; Ibid., B. D. B., p. 899-890; Davidson, *Analy. Heb. & Chald. Lex. (Zon.)*, 1972, p. 513; *Ryrie Study Bib., KJV*, 1978, fn. to Ruth 2:3).
3. In grace, God led her to the very **strip** of a **field** that was owned by the **man** she would later **wed**, Ru. 4:13a!
- B. Boaz then came to the field and exchanged godly greetings [jussives] with his workers, saying, "[May] Jahweh [be] with you," and they replying, "May Jahweh bless you," what would encourage Ruth, Ru. 2:4; Ibid., Kittel.
- C. He then noticed the new woman gleaning near his servant girls, so Boaz asked his foreman about her, and he explained that she was the Moabitess who had come from Moab with Naomi, Ruth 2:5-6. He also told of the woman's request that she glean near the harvest team servant girls, that once she gained his permission, she had worked steadily all morning long with only a short rest in the field shelter, impressing the foreman, 2:7.
- D. Seeing how Ruth was obviously trying to glean in safety, and knowing of her sacrifice in leaving her parents and country to help Naomi (Ru. 2:11), godly Boaz was used of God to give Ruth full safety, Ruth 2:8-9:
 1. Boaz addressed Ruth as "my Daughter," an endearing term (Ruth 2:8a), and used the idiomatic expression, "Have you not heard . . .?" (Ibid.) utilized to prompt a hearer to accept the speaker's advice (Ibid., B. D. B., p. 520) to urge her not to glean elsewhere, but stay close to his female servants for protection, Ruth 2:8b.
 2. Boaz also urged Ruth to glean near his female servants, and assured her that he had ordered his male servants not to "touch" her (*naga'*, Ibid., Kittel; Ibid., p. 1197 B. D. B., p. 619), not to make unwanted male advances toward her (Ibid., Gen. 20:6), thus treating her like a female servant on the team, Ruth 2:9a.
 3. He further told Ruth not to leave the field to draw water for her thirst, for that would leave her exposed to predators, but to drink the water his harvesters drew for the team so she might stay with the team, 2:9b.
- E. Moved by Boaz's offer of full protection, Ruth bowed before him to the ground, asking why he was showing her this favor, and he explained how impressed he had been in hearing of her widowhood and choice to return to Bethlehem with Naomi while leaving her parents and country for a strange land and people, and how he wished God's reward be given her by the God of Israel under whose protective wings she had come, 2:10-12.
- F. Ruth answered, asking Boaz to continue his care of her by employing the jussive (*'emsah'*, Ibid., Kittel; Ibid., Davidson, p. 33) translated, "Let me [continue to] find favor [from you, Boaz]," Ruth 2:13.
- G. Boaz then amply provided for Ruth's livelihood needs, going far beyond the Law's requirements, Ru. 2:14-17:
 1. Boaz invited Ruth to join him and the team at their noon meal in the field, and he handed her a portion of the food, culturally obligating himself as the host to protect her, v. 14, 18b; *Z. P. E. B.*, v. Four, p. 144.
 2. When Ruth rose from the meal to glean, Boaz told his male servants to let her glean even where the female servants picked up the cut stalks, and that the male harvesters drop extra cuttings for her, Ruth 2:15-16.
 3. Ruth thus acquired nearly an ephah of barley that day, 30 pounds of grain, enough food for her and Naomi for five days! (Ibid., *Bible Know. Com., O. T.*, p. 423; *Ryrie Study Bible, KJV*, 1978, fn. to Ruth 2:17)
- H. When Ruth returned to Naomi with her gleanings and meal leftovers, explaining all that happened, Naomi saw God's involvement. She told Ruth that Boaz was a "kinsman-redeemer" (*goel*, Ibid., Ryrie, fn. to Ru. 2:20; 3:9), a potential husband via the Law, Ru. 2:18-20; Deut. 25:5-10. Ruth added that Boaz had told her to stay with his servants for all his harvests, and Naomi agreed for Ruth's safety, Ru. 2:21-22. Ruth thus stayed with Boaz's team for the barley and wheat harvests, mid-May through June, v. 23; *Z. P. E. B.*, v. One, p. 76, 475.

Lesson: *When Ruth took the initiative under proper human authority to make a Biblical, prudent plan and then to work industriously in a dark world, God guided her and provide Boaz's godly and abundant help for her blessing.*

Application: *(1) May we believe in Christ for eternal life, John 3:16. (2) To function in PRACTICAL wisdom in a dark world with blessing, (a) may we like Ruth take the initiative (b) under proper human authority (c) to plan Biblically and prudently and (d) work industriously, and (3) see God bless such efforts with His added assistance.*

Conclusion: (To illustrate the message . . .)

In the illustrations in our introduction, it was the drift away from relying on the literal, grammatical, historical interpretations -- first of the Affordable Care Act and then of the Scriptures -- that led to darkness involved.

By contrast, Ruth's practical plan was built on the literal, grammatical, historical interpretation of Scripture, choosing to utilize the latter half of Leviticus 23:22 because in her era, that provision made for greater practical safety while gleaning! Ruth combined the literal, grammatical, historical interpretation of Leviticus 23:22b with common sense, and God did the rest to guide her to Boaz's property and through him to give her the needed safety and income!

May we face our dark world with practical wisdom as Ruth did and see God marvelously lead and help!