

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

A. Ruth's Handling Of Great Darkness With Faith In Scripture's Historically Proven God (Ruth 1:1-22)

Introduction: (To show the need . . .)

We need encouraging direction today on how to handle a world of suffocating spiritual darkness around us:

(1) Last Thursday, I heard radio talk show host Brad Davis on "The Talk of Connecticut" express dismay over the report that presidential hopeful Donald Trump had said that women who get abortions should be punished.

My wife informed me that Mr. Trump had been set up by an interviewer who had asked him that if abortion was ever outlawed, should a woman who got an abortion then be punished, to which he had replied, "Yes," since she would be violating the law. That part of the interview was lost in many reports, so Mr. Trump looked politically bad.

Ironically, Donald Trump's stance is supported by Exodus 21:22-23 in the Bible that calls for the execution of a man who causes a pregnant woman to miscarry so that her fetus dies, but you would never know it from the media!

(2) "America's First News" the same day told how Connecticut's Governor Malloy is inviting companies in North Carolina to move to Connecticut to escape their state's new law that requires people to use public restrooms that reflect the gender that is listed on their birth certificates, not what they now say is their gender. Our Governor holds that our state's tolerance of gender re-orientation is good while Leviticus 18:22 in the Bible calls it an abomination.

(3) When we consider this darkness that our nation faces from the media and government, it is easy for older believers like myself to be concerned about the beliefs of young people and young adults who are flooded with it.

Need: *So we ask, "What encouraging direction would God want us to take amid the world's great darkness?!"*

- I. When the young woman Ruth spoke with her mother-in-law Naomi on the road they travelled from Moab to Israel in the era of the Judges (Ruth 1:1-18), she was surrounded by a world of darkness:**
- A. Ruth's entire national heritage in Moab had been formed and was encased in very immoral spiritual darkness:
 - 1. The Moabite people originated with the union of Abraham's nephew Lot and one of Lot's daughters when his daughters got him drunk before becoming pregnant by him, Genesis 19:30-38 with Ruth 1:4.
 - 2. That immorality had been instilled in his daughters when Lot chose to move his family near Sodom (Gen. 13:12-13; 19:4-5), for the low moral standards of that city eventually negatively influenced his family.
 - 3. The people of Sodom in turn were very immoral Canaanites (Genesis 10:19), and the Moabites had developed immoral religious rites akin to the Canaanite cults, Zon. Pict. Ency. Bible, v. Four, p. 265.
 - B. Even Ruth's Hebrew husband and inlaws from Bethlehem in Judah were themselves in spiritual darkness:
 - 1. In Israel's spiritually dark era of the judges (Ruth 1:1a), God had caused the tribe of Judah in southern Israel to experience a great famine due to its sin (Ruth 1:1b with Deuteronomy 28:15, 23-24).
 - 2. Instead of repenting and trusting the Lord for food, Hebrews Elimelech and his wife Naomi with their sons Mahlon and Chilion left Bethlehem of Judah to relocate in Moab outside the Promised Land, Ruth 1:1c-2.
 - 3. There, Elimelech died, and Naomi's sons wed Gentiles in violation of the Law, Ruth 1:3-4; Ex. 34:14-16.
 - 4. These two sons then died, leaving their Moabite wives Ruth and Orpah childless, evidence of a lack of divine blessing on the deceased husbands in fulfillment of Deuteronomy 28:15, 18, 20.
 - C. Ruth's future seemed humanly foreboding due to her responsibility to help her aged, widowed mother-in-law:
 - 1. Naomi had heard that God had ended Judah's famine (Ruth 1:6), so she chose to move back there from Moab for a better life since all of the livelihood-producing men in her family had died, Ruth 1:7a.
 - 2. Naomi's Moabite daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth, began to follow Naomi back to Israel as dutiful inlaws culturally responsible to care for their aged and vulnerable mother-in-law, Ruth 1:7b.
 - 3. Yet, Naomi urged the two women to stay in Moab, for their own futures would be more secure were they to stay and rewed men of their country than to return with Naomi to Israel where they as foreigners would be unlikely to marry husbands who could give them security as women, Bible Know. Com., O. T., p. 420.
 - 4. Also, moving to Bethlehem of Judah in the era of the Judges was a risky relocation for young foreign widows: the Judges 19 abuse of the Levite's concubine near Bethlehem of Judah occurred early in the era of the judges, seen in noting from Judges 20:28 that Aaron's grandson was then the high priest, so the low morals of the area in Ruth's time made life dangerous there for a young foreign widow like her (Ruth 2:5).
- II. However, Ruth trusted Israel's historically proven God of Scripture for blessing to counter the darkness:**

- A. Naomi realized the risk involved for her Moabite daughters-in-law were they to follow her back to Israel, so she urged them to stay in Moab where they could more readily remarry for security, Ruth 1:8-13a. She added that God's judgment was on her for sin, that she did not think it good for them to stay with her, Ruth 1:13b.
- B. Though Orpah heeded Naomi's word, Ruth chose to cleave to Naomi (Ruth 1:14), and her faith in Israel's God of father Abraham with His *historical* promise to Gentiles like her was behind Ruth's decision to do so:
 1. Significantly for **Ruth**, a **Moabitess**, when she called for a curse on herself if she did not stay with Naomi in Ruth 1:17, she did *not* appeal to the name of **Moab's** god, **Kemosh** (B. D. B., A Heb.-Eng. Lex. of the O. T., p. 484; Ibid., Z. P. E. B., v. One, p. 786) **nor** invoke the *general* word for deity in **Elohim** what was used both for Israel's "God" and for Moab's pagan "god" (Ibid., Z. P. E. B., v. Two, p. 294-295)!
 2. Rather, she referred to **Jahweh** (Kittel, Bib. Heb., p. 1196), **Israel's "I AM" God** Who had appeared to Moses to *keep* His *covenant* with **Abraham** to redeem Israel from Egyptian bondage, Exodus 3:13-15; 2:24-25 with Genesis 15:8-21; Ryrie St. Bib., KJV, 1978, ftns. to Exodus 3:14 and Exodus 3:15.
 3. So, by appealing to **Jahweh**, Ruth showed she believed in **Israel's covenant-keeping Lord**, realizing that **He had appeared to Moses in Exodus 3:13-15 to uphold His Abrahamic Covenant (Ex. 2:24-25)**, so she **UNDERSTOOD the HISTORY of God's UPHOLDING that covenant in Israel's past EXODUS**.
 4. Ruth had thus heard from her Hebrew husband and/or kin of God's Genesis 12:1-3 covenant with Abraham that also promised divine blessings on those Gentiles who treated Abraham's seed well. Ruth's mother-in-law, Naomi, was of Abraham's seed and needed help in gaining a livelihood, so Ruth believed **Jahweh** would bless her as a **Gentile based on His Abrahamic Covenant PROVIDING she helped Naomi**.
- C. Thus, in one of the world's great texts of commitment, Ruth promised her allegiance to Naomi, Ruth 1:15-17:
 1. Ruth urged Naomi not to entreat her to leave from following with her, Ruth 1:15-16a.
 2. Instead, wherever Naomi went, Ruth would go with her, Ruth 1:16b.
 3. Wherever Naomi lodged, Ruth would lodge with her, Ruth 1:16c.
 4. Naomi's people would be Ruth's people, and Naomi's God would be Ruth's God, Ruth 1:16d,e.
 5. Where Naomi died, there Ruth would die, and there she would be buried, Ruth 1:17a.
 6. Ruth called for a divine curse on herself if anything but death separated her and Naomi, Ruth 1:17b.
- D. Naomi thus realized that Ruth was determined to stay with her, so she stopped trying to convince her otherwise, and the two women kept on traveling together to Bethlehem of Judah, Ruth 1:1-19a.
- E. The whole town of Bethlehem was moved by Naomi and Ruth's arrival (Ruth 1:19b), but Naomi, whose name means "Pleasant," told her townspeople to call her "Mara," meaning "bitter," for the Lord had afflicted her in judgment, Ruth 1:20-22; Ibid., Ryrie, ftn. to Ruth 1:20.
- F. Yet, Ruth the Gentile still hoped in God's blessing for being committed to helping her Hebrew mother-in-law.

Lesson: *Though the young woman Ruth was surrounded by spiritual darkness, she trusted in Israel's God and believed His Covenant to Abraham so as to care for her needy Hebrew mother-in-law, expecting God's covenant blessing upon her as a Gentile for doing so amid a humanly foreboding future in her choice to return to Judah.*

Application: *(1) In facing the darkness of our era, may we believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of the God of Abraham, for eternal life, John 3:16. (2) Then, like young Ruth of antiquity, may we trust and heed Scripture in its literal, grammatical and historical context regardless of the darkness we face, expecting God to bless us.*

Conclusion: (To illustrate the message . . .)

Last Sunday after our Easter Sunday morning service, two young men expressed to me their appreciation for the apologetic-style message that we had given on Christ's resurrection graveclothes out of John's Gospel.

I was encouraged by this, for these young men face a world around them that thrusts many anti-Christian ideas at them, just as the Apostle John faced when he penned his Gospel decades after the other three gospels were written.

One man specifically expressed appreciation for our sermon's revelation that decades had elapsed between the writing of the New Testament's first three gospels and the Gospel of John, for this *historical context* explained John's unusual approach that had previously confused him, and it evidenced to this man the credibility of John's Gospel.

That is the route God has always used to provide blessing amid the world's darkness. We need the literal, grammatical and *historical* interpretation of Scripture like Ruth the young Moabitess did in her world of darkness.

May we like the young Ruth of old and these two young men last Sunday handle the darkness we face by first (1) trusting in Christ for salvation, John 3:16. Then, may we (2) rely on the literal, grammatical and historical interpretation of God's Word (a) to define what is reality and (b) find His great reward in heeding it.