

Handfuls On Purpose

Studies in the Book of Ruth

Chapter Two

Learning To Fear the Lord

“¹ Now it came to pass in the days when the judges ruled, that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of Bethlehemjudah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he, and his wife, and his two sons. ² And the name of the man *was* Elimelech, and the name of his wife Naomi, and the name of his two sons Mahlon and Chilion, Ephrathites of Bethlehemjudah. And they came into the country of Moab, and continued there. ³ And Elimelech Naomi’s husband died; and she was left, and her two sons. ⁴ And they took them wives of the women of Moab; the name of the one *was* Orpah, and the name of the other Ruth: and they dwelled there about ten years. ⁵ And Mahlon and Chilion died also both of them; and the woman was left of her two sons and her husband” (Ruth 1:1-5).

If we are going to understand the Israel typified by Naomi, we need to understand what was happening in Israel at the time when the Judges ruled that Ruth 1:1 refers too. Josephus, the great Jewish historian at the time of Christ, places Boaz as a contemporary of Eli who judged Israel for 40 years from 1108 B.C until 1068 B.C.

Before we look at Eli, who he was and what kind of man he was, we want to look at the military situation existing in Israel at the time of Ruth. Israel was in the second phase of the four phase sin cycle of Judges 2:14.

“And the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel, and he delivered them into the hands of spoilers that spoiled them, and he sold them into the hands of their enemies round about, so that they could not any longer stand before their enemies” (Judges 2:14).

When the famine is removed from Israel, it is the fourth phase of the four phase sin cycle as detailed in Judges 2:16.

“Nevertheless the LORD raised up judges, which delivered them out of the hand of those that spoiled them” (Judges 2:16).

According to Ruth 1:4, we know Naomi stayed in Moab about 10 years or more. We also know from Old Testament chronology that if Eli was at Shiloh in 1108 BC., he was there at the beginning of the 18 year Ammonite oppression of Judges 10:6-8.

“⁶ And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the LORD, and served Baalim, and Ashtaroth, and the gods of Syria, and the gods of Zidon, and the gods of Moab, and the gods of the children of Ammon, and the gods of the Philistines, and forsook the LORD, and served not him. ⁷ And the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel, and he sold them into the hands of the Philistines, and into the hands of the children of Ammon. ⁸ And that year they vexed and oppressed the children of Israel: eighteen years, all the children of Israel that *were* on the other side Jordan in the land of the Amorites, which *is* in Gilead” (Judges 10:6-8).

This is probably the cause behind the famine in the land of Israel as recorded in the book of Ruth. By the time Naomi and Ruth returned to Bethlehem it was probably at the end of the Ammonite oppression when Eli and Jephthah were Judges in Israel. Jephthah judged in Gilead on the East side of the Jordon in the transjordon area. Eli judged on the West side of the Jordon at Shiloh as High Priest of Israel. So in Judges 10:6-8 we find the spiritual condition of Israel at the time of the book of Ruth.

First Samuel 2:12-17 and 22 tells us why this spiritual condition existed in Israel.

“¹² Now the sons of Eli *were* sons of Belial; they knew not the LORD. ¹³ And the priests’ custom with the people *was, that*, when any man offered sacrifice, the priest’s servant came, while the flesh was in seething, with a fleshhook of three teeth in his hand; ¹⁴ And he struck *it* into the pan, or kettle, or caldron, or pot; all that the fleshhook brought up the priest took for himself. So they did in Shiloh unto all the Israelites that came thither. ¹⁵ Also before they burnt the fat, the priest’s servant came, and said to the man that sacrificed, Give flesh to roast for the priest; for he will not have sodden flesh of thee, but raw. ¹⁶ And *if* any man said unto him, Let them not fail to burn the fat presently, and *then* take *as much* as thy soul desireth; then he would answer him, *Nay*; but thou shalt give *it me* now: and if not, I will take *it* by force. ¹⁷ Wherefore the sin of the young men was very great before the LORD: for men abhorred the offering of the LORD . . . ²² Now Eli was very old, and heard all that his sons did unto all Israel; and how they lay with the women that assembled {Heb. assembled by troops} *at* the door of the tabernacle of the congregation” (I Samuel 2:12-17 and 22).

Needless to say, the Tabernacle environment was very ungodly. Eli was the High Priest. We find a little about what kind of man he was in I Samuel 1:12-14.

“¹² And it came to pass, as she continued praying before the LORD, that Eli marked her mouth. ¹³ Now Hannah, she spake in her heart; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard: therefore Eli thought she had been drunken. ¹⁴ And Eli said unto her, How long wilt thou be drunken? put away thy wine from thee” (I Samuel 1:12-14).

Hannah, a godly woman replies to Eli’s accusation against her.

“¹⁵ And Hannah answered and said, No, my lord, I *am* a woman of a sorrowful spirit: I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but have poured out my soul before the LORD. ¹⁶ Count not thine handmaid for a daughter of Belial: for out of the abundance of my complaint and grief have I spoken hitherto” (I Samuel 1:15-16).

Eli was accustomed to seeing drunken women in the Tabernacle and was apparently used to tolerating them. Why?

“Now Eli was very old, and heard all that his sons did unto all Israel; and how they lay with the women that assembled *at* the door of the tabernacle of the congregation” (I Samuel 2:22).

This was much more than sexual sin (as wicked as that was). In the religion of Baalism, the priests of Baal were also male prostitutes who had sexual relations with the women who came to the Temple of Baal to worship Baal. Hophni and Phinehas had actually incorporated Baalism into the Tabernacle worship of God. Jehovah was the God, but Baal form worship was adopted.

This was the military, spiritual and religious atmosphere that is typified by Naomi in Moab. Is there any wonder why God’s chastisement was upon Israel and why there was famine in the land?

All during this time Israel is proclaiming God to be her King. What was Naomi’s husband’s name again? (Elimelech) What did it mean? Why didn’t Eli do something about his sons? Because being the High Priest was the next thing to being a king in Israel (there was no king at this time). Eli’s sons would inherit his position.

Why didn’t the people of Israel do something about the wickedness going on? Because most of them didn’t really care. Many of them enjoyed it. Others just said it wasn’t their problem. We should never forget that in all periods of history (Israel’s or the Church’s), God has placed the responsibility for purity upon those calling themselves His children.

“¹ It is reported commonly *that there is* fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as

named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife. ² And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you. ³ For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, *concerning* him that hath so done this deed, ⁴ In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, ⁵ To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. ⁶ Your glorying *is* not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? ⁷ Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us:" (I Corinthians 5:1-7).

Israel's leadership was not accountable to God because Israel was not accountable to God and neither group feared Him. God would use chastisement to teach them to fear Him.

"The fear of the LORD *is* the beginning {lit.: the principal part} of knowledge: *but* fools despise wisdom and instruction" (Proverbs 1:7).

If you can continue to live in the flesh without fearing God for the consequences, you need to go back to spiritual kindergarten. Chastisement takes you there. How do you know if you are a Christian who lives in the flesh? The works of the flesh will be manifested in your life.

¹⁹ Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are *these*; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, ²⁰ Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, ²¹ Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told *you* in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God" (Galatians 5:19-21).

If any of the things listed in Galatians 5:19-21 are continually or habitually evident in your life, you either need to get saved or you need to learn to fear the Lord. God will take you back to spiritual kindergarten with chastisement.

What was the first motivational truth every Jew was to teach His children? (Read Deuteronomy 6:1-3.)

¹ Now these *are* the commandments, the statutes, and the judgments, which the LORD your God commanded to teach you, that ye might do *them* in the land whither ye go to possess it: ² That thou mightest fear the LORD thy God, to keep all his statutes and his commandments, which I command thee, thou, and thy son, and thy son's son, all the days of thy life; and that thy days may be prolonged. ³ Hear therefore, O Israel, and observe to do *it*; that it may be well with thee, and that ye may increase mightily, as the LORD God of thy fathers hath promised thee, in the land that floweth with milk and honey.

They were to teach the children to fear the Lord before they taught them to love the Lord (Deuteronomy 6:4-9). What does it mean to "fear the Lord"? It was an Old Testament phrase of piety. It combined a reverential trust of God with a hatred of evil (sin).

Let me ask you this, have you taught your children to fear the Lord? Do you have a reverence of God and a hatred of any form of evil? If you don't, perhaps that is why your children don't fear the Lord.

When was the last time one of your children saw something wrong on TV and they turned it off or changed the channel in the middle of a show? When was the last time you got angry over something you saw that was wrong? If righteous indignation does not boil in your soul because of the thousands of babies being murdered each day, or over young children being taught homosexuality as an alternative lifestyle, or that lying is the normal thing you do if you want to be elected or get somewhere in this world, you do not fear the Lord!

Do you think Naomi learned to fear the Lord after what happened to her in Moab? What would you think of someone who had to repeat Kindergarten over and over again? Chastisement always takes us back to spiritual kindergarten. Many Christians have had to repeat Kindergarten over and over

again. Many of us will be back there again and again until we finally learn to fear the Lord.

If you have not learned to fear the Lord (reverence Him and hate sin), you do not know the God of the Bible the way He wants you to know Him. Why didn't Israel (and Christians today) fear the Lord? God was not *real* to them. How do we know that?

“¹ And the word of Samuel came to all Israel. Now Israel went out against the Philistines to battle, and pitched beside Ebenezer: and the Philistines pitched in Aphek. ² And the Philistines put themselves in array against Israel: and when they joined battle, Israel was smitten before the Philistines: and they slew of the army in the field about four thousand men. ³ And when the people were come into the camp, the elders of Israel said, Wherefore hath the LORD smitten us to day before the Philistines? Let us fetch the ark of the covenant of the LORD out of Shiloh unto us, that, when it cometh among us, it may save us out of the hand of our enemies” (I Samuel 4:1-3).

They had reduced the Ark of the Covenant to an idol. God wasn't real to them. If you don't fear the Lord, He probably isn't real to you either. If you want to learn to fear the Lord, God has to become real to you.

Learning to fear the Lord comes from an accurate knowledge of Who and What He is. Yes, He is a God of love, but He is also a God Who hates sin.

“¹⁶ These six *things* doth the LORD hate: yea, seven *are* an abomination unto him: ¹⁷ A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, ¹⁸ An heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, ¹⁹ A false witness *that* speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren” (Proverbs 6:16-19).

Something that is an “abomination” is something that is detestable and disgusting to you. To learn to fear God means to learn to have the same attitudes towards sin that He does, even the sin in your own life. When you have that attitude towards all sin it will produce genuine repentance in your life.

Christianity is so much more than a bunch of rules and regulations. It is a personal relationship between a person and the living God Who is the Creator of Heaven, earth and all that is in them. That God loves you. All He asks of you is to love Him in return. To love Him means to reverentially trust Him as the One Who created you and knows what is best for your life.

Can you reverentially trust Him? Can you accept the fact that if God hates something it is best if you learn to hate it too? To fear the Lord is a decision of the heart. Will you decide to fear the Lord today?

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1. Who does Josephus (the Jewish historian at the time of Christ) tell us Boaz was a contemporary of? _____

2. When did Eli judge Israel? 110_____ B.C to 106_____ B.C.
3. Read Judges 2:14 and Ruth 1:1-5 together. What phase of the four phase sin cycle was Israel in at this time? _____
4. Read Judges 2:16 and Ruth 1:6 together. What phase of the four phase sin cycle was Israel in at this time? _____
5. Read Ruth 1:4. How long did Naomi stay in Moab? _____
6. Read Judges 10:6-8. What was happening in Israel that began in 1106 B.C.? _____

7. From Judges 10:6-8 we can discover the conditions existing in Israel at the time of the book of Ruth. Read 1 Samuel 2:12-17. What was the spiritual condition behind all of this? _____

8. Read 1 Samuel 1:12-14. What do these verses reveal to us about Eli's Character (compare 2:12 and 22)? _____
9. According to 1 Samuel 2:22, what had Hophni and Phinehas actually incorporated into the Tabernacle worship of Jehovah? _____
10. Why didn't Eli do something about his sons? What was he trying to protect for future generations of his family? _____

11. Why didn't the people of Israel rise up and do something about this wickedness at the Tabernacle of God? _____
12. Read 1 Corinthians 5:1-7. Upon who has God placed the responsibility for a pure Church? _____

- A. Does that mean the Church should be involved in a *witch hunt* mentality? _____
- B. When unrepentant people refuse to do what is right, who does God hold responsible to deal with them? _____

14. Why was Israel's leadership not held accountable to God by God's people? _____

15. Read Proverbs 1:7. What was the *Kindergarten truth* Israel had not yet learned? _____

16. Read Galatians 5:19-21. What reveals a person who does not know enough to fear the Lord? How would that person recognized himself as someone who does not fear the Lord? _____

17. If you have not learned to fear the Lord, what will God have to do to teach you to do so? _____

18. From Deuteronomy 6:1-3, what was the first motivational truth every Jew was to teach his children?

19. Define what it means to fear the Lord. The fear of the Lord is a reverential _____ of God accompanied by a _____ of evil.

A. Do you suppose God might measure the success of parenthood beginning with this standard? _____

B. Based upon the above definition of the fear of the Lord, do you think you have taught your children to fear Him? _____

C. Based upon the above definition, can you honestly say you fear Him? _____

D. If you as a parent do not fear the Lord, do you think you will be able to teach your children to fear Him? _____

E. If this is all true, does your success as a parent and the success of succeeding generations of Christians depend upon you learning to fear the Lord? _____

20. Define *righteous indignation* and how it relates to the manifestation of the fear of the Lord in a life?

21. From the foundation we have laid thus far, how important do you suppose our learning to fear the Lord is to the Lord? _____

22. Read 1 Samuel 4:1-3. What was Israel's attitude toward the Ark of the Covenant that reveals that God was not real to them? _____

A. Is God real to you? _____

B. How do you know if He is real to you? _____

23. Read Proverbs 6:16-19. What are some of the *things* that God *hates*? _____

24. If you fear the Lord, will you have learned to hate these things too? _____

25. Define *ABOMINATION* _____

A. Is that your attitude toward the things of Proverbs 6:16-19? _____

B. If not, do you fear the Lord? _____