

I have been so very blessed when it comes to the women that God has put into my life.

You must understand that I grew up with two brothers.

We consumed piles of food and settled arguments by hitting each other.

I drew sharks, destroyed the quiet corner, and founded the Martian club in fifth grade.

I think that I had an emotion or two as I was growing up.

I went to Bible camp as a counselor and overheard some female counselors discussing monthly cramps.

I asked them, "Is that like an all-day thing?" They looked at me and laughed out loud.

They spent the next 30 minutes explaining it to me. I was clueless and uncomfortable.

I recall, on a mission trip on the east coast, going out for ice cream with one of my female friends.

On the way, she commented to me that she probably didn't need the ice cream.

I instantly agreed, "No you don't."

She was hurt. I was oblivious. I merely meant that really no one needs ice cream. We don't need it.

I spent the entire date trying to dig myself out of the hole I had dug for myself.

So, I didn't know about girls, really not until I met Nancy, who I found has more frequent emotions than I do.

Then God gave me three daughters. They are amazing people.

They will tell you that they had to teach me how to be a girl-dad, which is an art all unto itself.

I have been blessed by my mother, Nancy, and each of my three daughters who are each "women of strength."

We will soon understand together what that means, for we will see it in Proverbs and Ruth.

What is a woman supposed to be? Well, we see it in the Bible, in Proverbs and Ruth.

And, contrary to the message of modern media, it is not about how you look.

You might know that Proverbs 31 presents for us the woman of great worth, the "woman of strength."

In ancient times, Ruth was considered the model of Proverbs 31.

This morning I am going to build an argument to prove this from the Bible.

I will begin by utilizing Biblical/canonical evidence, which you may never have been exposed to before.

Ruth is the illustration of Proverbs 31 because of its place in the OT canon.

You cannot see this in English translations because for a long time we have put Ruth after Judges.

There is some sense to this because this is where the book of Ruth fits historically.

But this is not where Ruth was placed in the ancient Hebrew Bible that Jesus read.

This past January I spent 10 days in Savannah, GA with 15 other pastors.

It was a retreat where we got to focus on the Lord and the Scriptures every day.

Every morning our leader/camp counselor/former Seminary New Testament professor taught.

Our focus this year was "Canon and Covenant, the Structural and Theological Unity of the Bible."

I spent several hours yesterday creating a chart to help you all understand the point I am making.

This might, at first glance, appear complex. It's not.

You will find in your bulletins a chart titled, "The Covenantal Arrangement of the Christian Bible."

This is a graphical presentation of many of the lessons I learned in Savannah over those 10 days.

Look first at the note at the bottom.

The Bible is an amazing book, far more interesting and complex than the Koran or the Hindu Scriptures.

It was written over some 2,000 years in diverse cultures and places.

The authors were people who ranged from Kings, to fig pickers, to priests, to fishermen, to tax-collectors.

It has been read, studied, analyzed, and arranged by too many people to count.

It is so simple that anyone can read it and hear God speak to them.

It is so deep that, after 2,000 years, scholars are still trying to plumb the depths and understand it.

The verse at the top Jesus spoke to His disciples after His crucifixion and resurrection.

The way that He refers to the OT is instructive. It is how most Jews understand the Hebrew Scriptures.

Notice next how the NT Scriptures reflect the structure of the Hebrew OT... *Look at the chart.*

Now look at the upper right, the OT writings. These show Israel how to live out God's covenant.

These writings are meant to be used by God's people.

The five middle books (Ruth-Esther) have each been read at the 5 principal Jewish festivals/feasts.

Now, what is curious about the order of these books in the Hebrew Bible is the position of Ruth.

One might think that Song of Songs should precede Ruth.

Proverbs is attributed to Solomon, as is the Song of Songs.

The Feast of Weeks (same date as Pentecost) follows the Passover in the Jewish calendar.

But, instead of placing Ruth later, after Song of Songs or Lamentations, it follows Proverbs. Why?

It is because the reader, after reading Proverbs 31, needs to read about Ruth. She is the illustration.

I. What characterizes a woman of great worth?

Proverbs 31:10-31

Now we look at the concluding chapter of Proverbs.

Already, earlier in the book of Proverbs two women have been prominent, especially in chapters 1-9.

They are Lady Wisdom and the Harlot. A young man needs to seek the first and avoid the second.

And now the book closes with a description of the kind of woman to whom wisdom will lead a man.

The description is preceded by a warning. **Proverbs 31:3**

One can hardly read this without thinking of Solomon, who learned the folly of this the hard way.

And then we read **Proverbs 31:10** that begins the description of the right kind of woman.

Now, in most English translations, the connection between verse 3 and 10 is lost.

The Hebrew here in Proverbs 31:10 literally reads, "A woman of strength who can find?"

She is worth more than any amount of jewels or money.

Her description follows, but not once is she described physically. Not at all.

It is her character that is considered.

She is trustworthy. (31:11)

She is good and does her husband good. (31:12)

She works hard for the family. (31:13-16)

She is strong. (31:17)

She is diligent and not lazy. (31:18-19)

She is kindhearted. (31:20)

She is not fearful, but she is prepared. (31:21-22)

She brings honor to her husband. (31:23)

She is industrious. (31:24)

She is strong and she "smiles at the days to come." (31:25)

She speaks wisdom and kindness. (31:26)

She takes care of her household. (31:27)

Her children and husband praise her. (31:28)

She fears the Lord and so surpasses in value all those who do not. (31:29-31)

This is a reminder of Proverbs 1:7, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom."

This woman of strength is a woman who embodies the lessons of the Proverbs.

It is her godly character that makes her valuable, not her physical beauty.

Of course, this does not mean that she doesn't make herself pretty for her husband. She does.

But she knows that inner beauty (and strength) is more important.

We see this in the New Testament as well. **1 Peter 3:1-6**

One cannot read this without thinking of Ruth as well.

This is the "woman of strength" of Proverbs 31.

Now for a second argument for why Ruth is the model of the Proverbs 31 woman.

This will not be a canonical argument. This will be a linguistic argument.

Turn to **Ruth 3:10-11**, "You are a woman of strength."

This is exactly the same wording as what we read in Proverbs 31:10.

The writer, through the words of Boaz, is identifying Ruth as the Proverbs 31 woman.

How do we get here in the story? How does Boaz know this about Ruth, even before he marries her?

What is it about her that identifies her as a "woman of strength?"

For these questions we will need the whole story of Ruth.

II. Ruth fears the Lord.

Ruth 1:15-18

Disaster has stuck Naomi. She is far from home and has lost her husband and both of her sons. She asks her two daughters-in-law to leave her. She has no hope and thinks God is against her. **Ruth 1:11-13** But Ruth won't leave her. Why? Because she now trusts in Naomi's God, the Lord of Israel. Consider the promise that Ruth makes and then how Naomi responds. **Ruth 1:14-22**

III. Ruth worked hard to care for her mother-in-law.

Ruth 2:1-7

The chapter begins by identifying Boaz, though we have not met him yet, as "a man of strength." I have in the NASB a marginal note alerting me to this. English translations read, "a man of wealth" "a man of standing" "a worthy man." But the Hebrew again reads, "a man of strength." It's the same construction as "a woman of strength." This man has the same character as "the woman of strength."

What does she do? What does Ruth do?

She gets out there to find food for her mother-in-law.

She works hard and gathers grain. All the while we know that God is with her.

Boaz comes in and says, "who is she?" **Ruth 2:8-11**

Then she keeps working. Boaz protects her and blesses her.

Naomi sees it. **Ruth 2:20**

IV. Ruth displays wisdom, kindness and faith.

Ruth 3:1-11

Now Naomi tells Ruth to do something that no young woman ought to do.

What is Ruth told to do by her mother-in-law? Think about it.

She is going to get all dressed up and pretty and go to Boaz in the night when he is sleeping.

Then she is going to get under the covers at his feet!

Young ladies, this is not a command for how you ought to behave.

Naomi is telling Ruth to do this because she is desperate, and because she recognizes that God is at work.

And Ruth does it because she is obeying her mother-in-law to whom she has bound herself.

Boaz wakes up and is terrified, because he is a man of strength and heeds the warnings of Proverbs.

But then he realizes who it is and what she is doing. She is asking him to marry her.

Usually, the man would do this.

But Ruth is a foreigner, a widow, younger, and impoverished.

How would Boaz ever even think this might be a possibility? He wouldn't. So Ruth does.

She asks him to redeem her. And he does.

It takes some work, some arranging, but he does it swiftly and buys Ruth for his wife.

And when he gets Ruth, all the people in Bethlehem recognize that he has been blessed. **Ruth 4:11**

Literally the passage reads in Hebrew, "May you be a man of strength in Ephrathah..."

V. The Lord blessed Ruth, her husband, and family.

Ruth 4:13-17

Ruth, the woman of strength has been redeemed by Boaz. He is her redeemer.

She is the fulfillment of what a woman in Israel ought to be, even though she is a Moabitess.

And God blesses Ruth with a baby boy.

And Ruth becomes the great-grandmother to King David.

And Ruth has a place in the lineage of Jesus the Messiah, her ultimate redeemer.

What is it that makes Ruth admirable? What is it that makes her an example?

It is her commitment to Naomi's God, the Lord Almighty.

It is her character and her hard work and her kindness to Naomi.

It is her willingness to trust God even when things look hopeless. She smiles at the future.

And so, Ruth is the woman that Proverbs 31 describes.

Ladies, may you be that kind of woman for the glory of the Lord.