

Subject: Ruth and Naomi, Ruth 1, 16-22—Golden Text, Rom. xii., 16—Memory Verses, 16, 17—Commentary on the Day's Lesson.

16. "And Ruth said." After Orpah had returned, Naomi again put the test upon Ruth. Naomi would have her know and realize fully the importance of her decision, and urge upon her to decide it for God. This also would help her to contrast the difference between a heathen woman and an Israelite. The question would then be settled upon the side of religion. It was settled upon its comforts and familiarities and idols, or it was a strange land, among strangers, in the service of Israel's God. It was a separation from all her former life to go with Naomi. "Intreat me not to leave thee." Here came the answer from the heart. At this great crisis in her life Ruth kept close company with one who served the God whom she now chose. She pleaded for the personal help and fellowship of Naomi. She desired that she would not refer to her idols, relatives and home, while she was in such a trying position. At once she decided on her associates, and broke away from every opposing influence. "Whither thou goest I will go." Thus Ruth ends the debate. Nothing could be more decisive or brave than this; she seems to have had another spirit and another speech, now her sister was gone, and it is an instance of the grace of God inclining the soul to the resolute choice of the better part. Though to a country unknown to her and one of which she had been trained to have a low opinion she would travel there with Naomi. "Where thou lodgest, I will lodge." By her firm resolutions she declared her purpose to be one with Naomi's people. Though Naomi was under affliction, and returning to her own country in humility, Ruth was firm in her purpose to share in her lot. "Thy people shall be my people." Thus she would renounce all her connections and prospects in the land of Moab, and live according to all the rules of Naomi's people in Canaan. "And thy God my God." I will adore the God of Israel, the only living and true God, trust in Him alone, serve Him, and in everything be ruled by Him.

17. "Will I die." Ruth made this her lifetime choice. "There will I be buried." Not desiring to have so much as her dead body carried back to the country of Moab, in token of any remaining kindness for it. She would, in this choice, desire to forget all relationship with her own people or their religion. She was ready to make the change with all it meant. "The Lord do so," etc. To prove her sincerity in this matter Ruth called God to witness, and asked Him to multiply her troubles if she did not keep true to this solemn vow. Her words were an ancient form of an oath. By thus calling God to witness she would fix a lasting obligation upon herself never to leave this way. It came to pass, even as they desire, for when Naomi became old she lived with Ruth and Boaz and was the nurse of their son Obed. Chap. 4, 15, 18.

18. "Then she left speaking." There could be no room to doubt her sincerity and true motive. Her vow was convincing. Since Ruth's purposes reached beyond a mere impulse and family affection, Naomi was safe in allowing her to face all the consequences with her.

19. "They two went." When they were both of the same mind they could walk together. When they were pledged to be true to God they then could find abundance of love for each other and fellowship so dear. The journey could be made with joy, even though they keenly felt their loss and bereavement in their widowhood. "The city was moved." It appears that Naomi was not only well known but highly respected also at Bethlehem; a proof that Elimelech was of high consideration in that place. "Is this Naomi?" Her friends had remembered her as they last saw her. What their sorrow was at having to go into a heathen country we do not read, but they eagerly met her. The change which affliction had wrought surprised Naomi's friends. They probably were surprised at her poverty, since she had been in Canaan to escape the famine.

20. "Call me Mara." Her former name was fitting in her former life, as Naomi means beautiful, pleasant, sweetness. Now that affliction had changed her lot Mara, meaning bitterness, was a more suitable name. They had known her young, happy and free from care. By this request her submission to her lonely lot, and also her patient spirit toward those who commented upon her affairs. "The Almighty hath dealt." She acknowledges the hand of God, His mighty hand in the affliction. It was duty and her interest to submit to Him. She had not chosen the affliction. She felt the bitterness of her lonely life and circumstances, yet her heart yearned to serve Him among His people.

21. "Went out full." Having a husband and two sons. Her cup of joy was full. "Home again empty." The Lord spared her life and enabled her to return, but He had taken all her family. "Testified against me." Since God had wrought the change in her life, according to His wisdom, she would not hold to the name that spoke contrary to His dealings. With her affliction there was humility. God's rod of affliction was as His voice. She humbly considered her affliction as coming from the Lord's hand upon her and her family for sin. Perhaps she considered herself as guilty in not having left Moab immediately on the death of her husband. Yet we conclude that Naomi was receiving the peaceable fruits of righteousness, from her affliction, since she held her integrity, and sought a humble place among God's people, offering her humble confession to them.

22. "Barley harvest." Usually in the middle of April. The fact of its being barley harvest suggested to Ruth that she might go forth to glean. This right of gleaning was one of the legal provisions for the poor of Israel, and as the land holders were not subject to money taxes for the support of the poor, this claim was liberally construed by them. The part of the field to which Ruth was provisionally directed belonged to Boaz, near kinsman of Naomi's late husband.

The remainder of the book of Ruth tells of her reward for the choice she had made. 1. She found a means of supporting her mother-in-law. 2. She won the respect and favor of the people among whom she lived. 3. She gained a most excellent husband and home. 4. Ruth had the honor of including among her descendants the great kings David and Solomon, and, above all, Jesus the Christ. Still we are to be careful not to count on outward rewards with the real reward of virtue.

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