

RUBIES FROM RUTH

by

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CHAPTER TWO

EXPOSITION: RUTH ONE

The sacred and sublime beauty of this remarkable record cannot be surpassed. This “prose idyll” is so graphic that it grips the reader and holds his interest from beginning to end. Its sublime simplicity and trustful transparency stamp the narrative as a sincere and true record of events between the days when the Judges ruled and the setting up of the kingdom of Israel under Saul. God has never left Himself without a witness and even in the darkest days there have been those, who, like Elimelech, Boaz, Ruth, Simeon, Anna, Zacharias and Elizabeth, have lived near to God and kept the light of holy religion burning brightly.

The book of Ruth lifts the curtain which veils the private and domestic life of Naomi and Ruth.

It discloses to us, even in those dark and dreadful days, the piety, integrity, self-sacrificing character and conduct, gentleness and charity of husbands and wives, mother-in-law and daughters-in-law—all growing and cultivated amid the sickening scenes of war and strife and the abounding abominations of idolatrous worship. God has never left Himself without witnesses. When Satan was busy corrupting the masses, God also was busy, and in His own way was moving ever forward toward the fulfillment of His own gracious purposes and plans for the race.

“NOW”

The first word of the book of Ruth links the book of Judges to the book of Samuel. Exodus is joined to Genesis by the word “**now.**” Leviticus is linked to Exodus by the word “**and.**” Numbers is merged with Leviticus also by the word “**and.**” Deuteronomy is attached to Numbers by the word “**these,**” and thus the Pentateuch becomes one grand and glorious unit. Joshua is joined to Deuteronomy by the word “**now.**” Judges is also linked to Joshua by the word “**now,**” and Ruth is linked to Judges also by the word “**now.**” The sixty-six volumes which compose the Holy Bible constitute one great, grand and glorious whole. It is impossible to grasp fully the import of any one book without understanding, at least in a measure, the preceding book or books. The treasury of truth known as the Bible has come from God and is a divine unit.

“IT CAME TO PASS”

There is always something coming to pass when God is around. Stagnation is impossible when God is present. The presence of God saves us from melancholia and monotony.

“WHEN THE JUDGES RULED”

The book of Ruth opens in the times of the Judges which was a time of anarchy, bolshevism, communism, strife, lawlessness and wickedness, every man doing “**that which was right in his own eyes.**”

The closing chapters of the book of Judges set forth in no uncertain terms exactly what happens when God lifts His hand and allows man to go his own way. The times of the Judges was the worst period in the history of the people of God. Each person was a law to himself, and all standards of truth and righteousness were disregarded. The horrible crimes chronicled in the book of Judges were made possible because God had been despised, His Word dishonored, and holiness rejected. Preachers and people alike were selfish and impure. Crime and chaos are always the result of the rejection of God’s counsels. Law and order are impossible so long as men do that which is right in their own eyes. In the last analysis, the choice is always between Christ and chaos. To reject Christ and refuse obedience to Him is to invite chaos and ruin. The days of the Judges were dark, dreadful and dreary days. They were exceedingly trying times. Moses and Joshua were dead. Unfaithfulness prevailed and famine followed.

“IN THE LAND”

To the people of God, the land of Canaan was the land of promise and the place of their rest. That Canaan does not typify heaven is plainly seen from the fact that there was strife, famine, war and even death in Canaan. As Egypt typifies this present evil world, so Canaan typifies the experience of perfect love and perfect rest here and now which is enjoyed by faith.

“A FAMINE IN THE LAND”

The land to which reference is here made is the land of Canaan. Famine always follows disobedience and unfaithfulness. Famine is possible even in the land of Canaan. Under famine headlines humanity writes its history. There is always a famine in some lands— either a famine of bread, or of sympathy, or of hope, or of truth and love. Unfaithfulness to God, disobedience to truth, rejection of holiness are always followed by famine. “**A famine in the land**”—even the land of Canaan.

A want of bread in the house of bread! The willfulness, wickedness and waywardness of the people of God compelled El-Shaddai to hide His face. As certain as there is a God in the heavens, so certain is it that sorrow and sighing, sickness and want, famine and death follow sin. The famine about which the inspired writer speaks was undoubtedly occasioned by the depredations of the enemies of Israel, who carried off the corn and destroyed the harvest. Israel failed to drive them out and now they must endure the famine.

“A CERTAIN MAN OF BETHLEHEM-JUDAH”

Bethlehem means “*the house of bread.*” Judah means “*praise.*” Bethlehem-Judah means “*the house of bread and the place of praise.*” To crown Christ as King and live in Canaan is indeed heaven begun on earth.

“WENT TO SOJOURN”

Under the pressure of a great test an ancient and honorable Hebrew family resolved to abandon their inheritance in Canaan and go down to seek satisfaction in the land of Moab. In looking for a livelihood they lost life, love and liberty.

It was not the intention of Elimelech to live, abide or dwell in Moab; he planned only to sojourn there; he never dreamed of continuing there or dying there.

The country of Moab was cursed by God and doomed to destruction. Christ is yet again to smite the corners of Moab. The Moabites were especially odious to the Jews. The Moabites had their origin in one of the darkest deeds recorded in Scripture.

Ruth, the principal figure of the book, was a Moabitess. Grace, however, triumphs over every difficulty, leaps over every barrier and jumps every hurdle. The book of Ruth shows the triumph of divine grace despite the most adverse circumstances. The redeemed, sanctified and rejoicing Ruth was of the country of the miserable Moabites.

“ELIMELECH DIED”

Elimelech departed from Canaan, went down, and died in Moab. He died among the enemies of God, and was buried outside of his inheritance. Very few people intend to continue in and die in a life of sin and disobedience. There is only one time however to stop sinning, and that time is now. Tomorrow is eternity. Unless we intend to die sinning, we should stop sinning now. Elimelech died in Moab.

“Elimelech seems to have been blamable, in removing from the ordinances and people of God. The famine was not so extreme but others could endure it; and he evidently was a person not likely to want the necessities of life”—Scott.

“MAHLON AND CHILION”

The two sons of Elimelech represent his fruitfulness in the land of Canaan. Elimelech revealed his spiritual state by naming his first-born “*Sick*” and his second-born “*Pining*.” There is a profound meaning to names in the Scriptures. Eve named her second son Abel (*vanity*) and thus revealed the disappointment and chagrin of her soul over the conduct of Cain. Eve discovered that all was vanity and vexation of spirit long before Solomon was born. The fruit of Elimelech and Naomi was sick and pining. The little foxes that spoiled the vines had done their deadly work. Elimelech began well, but something hindered. What was it? Perhaps we had better ask what hinders us. Elimelech once enjoyed the milk and honey, figs and dates. He did run well and we are left to wonder what hindered him. The doctor and undertaker of Moab reaped the benefit of his backslidings. His compromisings ended in death.

“THEY TOOK THEM WIVES”

God gave Eve to Adam. This is always God’s plan. He who is all-wise always gives that which is good and best.

Sin came between man and God, and man began to choose his own ways and follow the sight of his own eyes, **“Lamech took unto him two wives.”** Mahlon and Chilion pursued the same crooked course. **“They took them wives,”** and, contrary to the Word of God, they were wives of Moab. God had definitely prohibited marriage with strangers.

Marriage between a believer and an unbeliever is not only inexpedient but is very dangerous. Christ and Belial, light and darkness, sin and holiness are unalterably opposites. All unholy alliances are forbidden. Mahlon compromised with his conscience and trifled with the truth of God. His marriage to the Moabitish woman constituted a clear violation of the commandment of God (Deuteronomy 23:3). Mahlon and Chilion plainly pursued a path contrary to the commandments of God by taking to themselves the maidens of Moab.

“RUTH”

The principal figure in this unsurpassed “prose idyll” is Ruth. As a Moabite she was particularly odious to the Jews. The Moabites had their origin in one of the darkest days and one of the most corrupting crimes of Old Testament history (Genesis 19). A Moabite was interdicted from entering the fellowship of the congregation of God (Deuteronomy 23:3).

Grace, however, triumphed over law, leaped every hurdle and bounced over every barrier; and Ruth the Gentile became the bride of Boaz the Jew, the restorer of life to Naomi the backslider.

The word “Ruth” means *“satisfied.”*

- While the people of God were forsaking Him, Ruth the Moabite was seeking Him.
- While the chosen people were being punished for their perverseness and impurity, Ruth was being blessed for turning to Him.

Without the beautiful and rich little book of Ruth, the fact that Ruth was an ancestress of Jesus Christ would have been unrevealed. Here is a sufficient reason for the Holy Spirit inspiring its pages and giving it a place in the sacred canon.

“MAHLON AND CHILION DIED ALSO”

For an Israelite to be childless and have the family name die out was considered an unspeakable calamity. The once happy and holy family of Elimelech was reduced to three weary, sad and childless widows, and all because Elimelech failed in the test, failed to wait patiently, failed to endure and believe where he was unable to see and feel, failed to keep his spiritual temperature at white heat, failed to keep his heart hot with old-time salvation, failed to walk, wait and work with a single eye to the glory of his the Lord God.

“AND THE WOMAN WAS LEFT OF HER HUSBAND”

Woman’s heart—so capable of pleasure and pain—is often broken by bereavement. Hopes blighted that have but budded. The nest stirred and only the bare thorns and thistles left. Naomi—is now a widow.

Think of Hannah, the widow of Nain, she by the cross, and Naomi. What desolation and distress sin has caused! What sorrow sin has brought into our world! If all the tears shed in our world could be gathered together, what an ocean they would form. If all the pain and heartache could be collected—what an explosion! “The woman was left of her husband.

“SHE HEARD THAT THE LORD HAD VISITED HIS PEOPLE”

When the Lord visits us, others will hear about it. Tests may come, but if we hold steady, the Lord will be with us in the tests and take us triumphantly through them. It is far better to die a pauper in the Promised Land than to die a millionaire in Moab. The good news that God had visited His people was heard even in Moab. Some faithful messenger, unknown by name on earth, told the glad tidings that there was bread again in Bethlehem. In all ages and under all circumstances faithful witnesses have made known to a weary world that there is bread in Bethlehem. The poor, desolate and brokenhearted Naomi heard that the Lord had visited His people in giving them bread.

“THEN SHE AROSE”

After the death of her Hebrew husband, after the marriage of her two sons to Moabitish women, after the death and burial of her only sons, after her heart had been broken by bereavement, and after her soul had been crushed by corroding care, then she arose that she might return from the country of Moab. Sin always brings sorrow and suffering. Disobedience spells death. Sin, disobedience, willfulness and waywardness, always end in sorrow and death.

“OUT OF”

“**Get thee out**” was the word of God to Abraham. “**Out of Egypt and into Canaan**” was the command of God to the children of Israel. Separation always precedes sanctification. This evil world must be given up if the fullness of heaven is to be gained. The swine troughs and hog pens must be forsaken if we would sit at Father’s table and enjoy the sweets of the Saviour’s love and grace. “**The friendship of the world is enmity against God.**”

“SHE WENT FORTH OUT”

If you have failed God, left Canaan, and are now outside His will, why not go “**forth out**”? Cease your wanderings, repent and return to Bethlehem-Judah, the house of bread and place of praise.

“SHE WENT FORTH OUT OF THE PLACE WHERE SHE WAS”

A decision was made which was sufficiently deep-seated to cause her to leave the old place, the old crowd, the old pleasures and follies, and, like the Prodigal Son, start for home. Contrast:

- (1) A wholly sanctified person walking in the light, with his face toward the sun and his back upon Egypt, the Red Sea, the wilderness and the Jordan, and
- (2) A poor backslider from Canaan’s beautiful land.

Again, contrast:

(1) A happy home and husband, two beautiful baby boys, holy fellowships and pure worship and
(2) Widowhood, weeping, distressed, husbandless, childless, helpless and hopeless, with a broken, bleeding heart and a bitter spirit.

May this be a sufficient warning to us all.

“GO, RETURN . . . TO . . . MOTHER’S HOUSE”

Naomi, walking by sight instead of faith, never intending to go far in disobedience, only meaning to **“sojourn in Moab”** but finally settling and dwelling there, allowing her children to marry contrary to the Word of God, blaming God for the sorrows brought upon herself by her own sin, perverting God’s order in her own life and ways and now seeking to turn back those who would follow the right way, is a perfect picture of the poor backslider.

“GO, RETURN EACH TO HER MOTHER’S HOUSES”

Naomi had lost the zeal and fire of old-time Canaan salvation. She had lost her first love and desire to win souls to her God, and here actually encourages two lovely girls to start back to Moab. What a tragedy to get so far away from God and holiness after having once known the truth!

Here is an Israelite influencing a Gentile away from God and Canaan. Naomi, once happy and holy but now sorrowing and sad, blames God for her backslidings and influences Orpah to return to her idols and gods, an Israelite urging a Gentile to go back to the beggarly elements of the world.

Instead of inviting them to God and Canaan she now is driving them away.

“FIND REST, EACH OF YOU IN THE HOUSE OF HER HUSBAND”

What blindness on the part of Naomi! The idea of finding rest and happiness in the house of a heathen husband! The idea of finding rest in marriage to a Moabite! It is indeed surprising how far a backslider may sink into blindness and unbelief.

“THAT THEY MAY BE YOUR HUSBANDS”

If Naomi had been as concerned about their spiritual rest as she seemed to be about their earthly rest it would have been much better for poor Orpah. Naomi’s heart was still concerned about marriage and home and material things. Marriage and home does not necessarily mean happiness.

Why not urge the two weary widows to hurry over into Canaan’s happy land, instead of fussing about husbands and homes?

“WHY WILL YE GO WITH ME?”

Naomi intimates that she had no other sons to give them, that she was not with child, that she was too old to marry again and that though she should marry again and have children, yet they could not wait until such sons were of marriageable age.

“I AM TOO OLD”

There is something very pathetic, persuasive and affecting in the words of Naomi to her daughters-in-law.

First, she intimates that she has nothing to offer them in return for their friendship.

Second, she acknowledges her childless, unfruitful state.

Third, she confesses her hopeless condition.

Fourth, she philosophizes with them against any more delay in seeking husbands for themselves, and,

Fifth, she seems to blame the Lord God for it all, and begs the lonely girl-widows to return to their own country and settle among their own kith and kin.

Naomi is both bitter and blind, and this is ever the end of the backslider's trail. Backsliding makes a person old before his time.

“A good woman never grows old. Years may pass over her head, but, if benevolence and virtue dwell in her heart, she is as cheerful as when the spring of life first opened to her view. Who does not respect and love the woman who has passed her days in acts of kindness and mercy—who has been the friend of man and God—whose whole life has been a scene of kindness and love, and a devotion to truth? We repeat, such a woman cannot grow old. She will always be fresh and buoyant in spirits, and active in humble deeds of mercy and benevolence.”

“ORPAH”

The story of Ruth and Orpah is a parable of spiritual life. Both came face to face with the choice between God and gods.

Ruth counted all things loss that she might gain Canaan. Having forsaken all, she gained all. Religion without redemption proved too strong for Orpah went back to her relations and to her religion, took the advice of Naomi. It was the kind of advice she wanted and welcomed. If one wishes to return to one's own ways and one's own religion there is always some soured Naomi to advise the course which one prefers to pursue.

“Is Gone Back”

Naaman was kind, generous and rich, a good husband, an ideal master to his men, considerate of his servants, every inch a nobleman, gentleman, soldier and citizen—but he was a leper. Orpah was a kind and attractive creature, a dutiful and loving daughter-in-law, perfectly womanly and winsome—but she went back to her people and her gods.

The difference between mere kindness of manner and sweetness of nature and that unselfish love and self-sacrificing devotion which wins Christ and heaven is most vividly and beautifully depicted in the closing words of verse 14, “**But Ruth clave unto her.**”

“HER PEOPLE AND HER GODS” (1:15)

Orpah went back to her relation and to her religion. In-laws and out-laws will hinder the progress of the soul on the highway of holiness. Religion without the Holy Ghost; confessions without the blood of Christ, religion without repentance and regeneration have been a stumblingblock in the path of people in all ages.

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“What is there about friendship which made it possible for Henry Clay Trumbull to call it “the master passion’? Have you in your own life any such relation which you can unreservedly call great? Is anything selfish and exclusive and limited ever great? What does real friendship demand and what does it test?”

— Charlotte H. Adams.

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Orpah started and then stopped short of the goal posts.

She continued for a while but lacked persistence and the will to finish. Like Lot’s wife she perished between her Sodom and safety and salvation. She wept but went back to her own ways. Weeping cannot save.

Without the will to persevere and pursue we may as well never start on the way to holiness and blessedness. One may as well expect to reap a harvest from a bare rock, build a home on the Atlantic Ocean, stop the sun from shining, and expect to keep death out of the palace as expect to receive the rewards of faithfulness without patience, purity, persistence and perseverance.

The American Indian who sold land for a string of beads was not more foolish than the Orpahs, Esaus and Sauls who sell out for a basin of broth. Better to have the Juggernaut of the Hindus pulverize the body to powder than to sell the soul for either barns, bungalows, or banana splits. The Orpahs and Sapphiras are not all dead.

We have often seen big ships out on the bay, swinging with the tide, and seeming as if they would launch out into the mighty ocean, and yet they do not, indeed they cannot. Down beneath the water they are anchored.

Many people seem at times to sway toward heaven, holiness and God, but they evidently remain anchored to some secret, self-chosen sin. Cain, Achan, Korah, Saul, Orpah, Demas, Ananias and Sapphira are examples and warnings.

LESSONS FROM ORPAH

I. It is possible to go a long way towards Christianity, and yet not be a Christian. It will not do to be almost, we must be altogether, decided for Christ.

II. It is possible to deceive ourselves, and to think that all is right, when in truth all is wrong with our souls.

III. Our religion will not profit us at all unless it be characterized by perseverance and faithfulness. No grace, however bright and precious, will reward us in heaven without faith and perseverance.

How many part with Christ at this crossway! Like Orpah, they go a furlong or two with Christ, till He goes to take them off from their worldly hopes, and bids them prepare for hardship, and then they fairly kiss and leave Him. — Gurnall.

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“Away with all mere affection which kisses, but does not cleave to Christ!”

“GONE BACK . . . UNTO HER GODS”

Evidently both Ruth and Orpah were idolaters. Think of two Hebrew youths marrying godless Moabitish women and dying outside of their promised inheritance! How tragic! How dangerous to marry contrary to the explicit statements of the Scriptures. Orpah wept, but weeping cannot save. Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but human affection cannot save. Orpah is gone back unto her gods!

“THEY WEPT AGAIN”

Orpah and Ruth wept. Together they had hoped and loved, and now together they weep. They have reached the parting of the ways, and unfortunately for Orpah, she kissed and left her mother-in-law, looked back and was lost. “**Not far from the kingdom,**” she nevertheless never entered it, but Ruth clave unto Naomi. Both Orpah and Ruth wept. Both were moved.

Orpah, however, had nothing but emotion, which spent itself in tears and embraces, while Ruth had sufficient energy in her emotion to carry her into Canaan (holiness) and into the field of Boaz (service).

There is a religion which may be without emotion, but there is no uplifting power in it. Morality if not touched by emotion is colorless and inglorious.

There is a religion which is nothing but emotion, but, as in the case of Orpah, there is lacking a firm will and a steady persistence and endurance. The purely emotional type is fugitive and volatile and shallow.

There is also a religion filled with emotion and charged with purpose — pure religion; Bible religion; Ruth’s religion and the only religion worthwhile.

Religion with nothing but emotion is false and fanatical. Religion without emotion is formal and dead. Religion filled with emotion and fired by a high and holy purpose is divine.

“RUTH CLAVE UNTO HER”

Ruth’s resolution was made in the teeth of tremendous difficulties. Her past was against her.

Cradled in a heathen home and schooled in the worship of immoral gods, she was utterly unfit to be a joint heir with the Hebrews. Naomi seemed against her. Naomi’s tears and pleadings to return to Moab and find rest was hard to resist. Voices inward and outward urged her to return to Moab.

Ruth, however, was a heroine in her own right. Neither height nor depth nor length nor breadth could shake her loose from her love of Naomi and Naomi’s God. Again, the future was against her. Self-exiled from home and loved ones, it must have been difficult for her to decide, but she decided—and decided in favor of Canaan and God.

Orpah, content with a profession of affection, returned to her people and to her gods. The kinsman who failed to follow the law of Moses and failed to fulfill his duty because of self-interest has not even his name mentioned. Ruth, giving up all to follow Naomi’s God, rests in the lap of luxury and love and is everlastingly remembered, blessed and happy.

The word “**clave**” is a very suggestive word. It is used:

- Of the clods of earth which cleave fast together (Job 38:38);
- Of leviathan, the sea monster, the scales of which are joined one to another so that air cannot come between them (Job 41:15-17);
- Of Naaman’s leprosy, in judgment cleaving to Gehazi (II Kings 5:27);
- Of David who followed hard after the Lord (Psalm 63:8).

The word “clave” as used in reference to the resolve of Ruth shows intense earnestness. There was no hesitation, no vacillation and no self-seeking. She was blessed with grit, grace and grip. Thank God, for the Ruths that remain with us.

Naomi left Canaan (holiness) full and came back empty, but, thank God, she came back. Despite her sorrow, despair and disappointment, she came back to her God and to her first love.

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“It has been said, ‘There is no test of a man better than the friends he makes.’ It is as true to say, ‘There is no better test of a man than the friends he breaks.’ A man comes to you and says he has had his lesson and means to make a new start. But does he go back to the old set? That is the question. **‘Can two walk together except they be agreed?’**”

“If you wish your friendships to be like Ruth’s, steppingstones to heaven, let them be built like hers—on Naomi’s God.” — W. Mackintosh Mackay.

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- **ELIMELECH** is a type of Israel. He was in the land, unfaithful and disobedient, forsaken by the Lord, and died in disobedience.

- **NAOMI** is a type of Israel in unbelief; she was away from the land and endured sorrow upon sorrow, but was finally restored and happy.

- **BOAZ** is a type of Christ as the Lord of the Harvest, Redeemer and Bridegroom.

- **RUTH** is a type of the bride of Christ; a poor, penniless, helpless stranger, she became the happy bride of the lord of the harvest.

- **ORPAH** is a type of the worldling; leaving Moab but halting on the borders of the Promised Land, she finally returned to her own ways and her own gods.

“RETURN THOU AFTER THY SISTER IN LAW”

What strange advice! Once living in Canaan and enjoying the good things of Bethlehem-Judah but for ten years mixing with Moabites, Naomi now advises others not to enter Canaan, advises others to follow backsliders and with them go back to their own wicked worldly relations and religions. Strange advice indeed!

Behold the influence of a wanderer from the paths of purity! Behold the height of folly to which a person may rise when once he steps from the highway of holiness. Think of it! **“Return thou after thy sister in law.”**

Orpah went back. Ruth also was tempted to halt, hesitate and return to Moab. But what is there in Moab? Idols, graves, sorrow, disappointment, memories of the past, loneliness, despair and death.

What is there in Canaan? The house of bread, God’s land, God’s will, God’s people, Boaz, fields for service, grapes, figs, milk, honey, parched corn, fellowship with the lord of the harvest.

Ruth, thank God, resisted the temptation, stood the test; and while Orpah went back, back to her people and back to her gods, Ruth stepped over into Canaan’s happy land, the home of God’s happy people.

“WHITHER THOU GOEST, I WILL GO” (1:16)

This is one of the many faith decisions mentioned in the Bible.

“I will go, in the strength of the Lord” was the decision of David as he set out to witness for his Lord (Psalm 71:16).

“I will go” was the response of the Prophet Elisha as he set out with the sons of the prophets to enlarge the college (II Kings 6:3).

“I will go as at other times” was the determination of the trifling and selfish Samson as he raised himself from the lap of the deceitful and deceiving Delilah, not knowing that the Spirit of the Lord had departed from him (Judges 16:20).

“I will go” was the brave decision of the dutiful Deborah as she started to fight the battles of the Lord.

“I will go” was the final answer of Rebekah as she unselfishly risked her all to be the bride of Isaac (Genesis 24:58).

“I will go” was the heartsick decision of the so-called Prodigal Son as he headed for his father’s house (Luke 15:18).

“I will go” was the resolve of Ruth as she nestled close to the bosom of Naomi.

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Cursed by the law and with nothing to bring or give to Boaz except herself, Ruth becomes a Gentile fellow-heir and finally the bride of Boaz, the lord of the harvest. Completely separated from her former life, religion and friends, unreservedly committing herself to the care and protection of the Lord God and His people; humble, submissive and full of faith, Ruth renounced all freedom of choice and from henceforth the whole course of her life was determined by another. Having put her hand to the plough she refused to turn back, and finally inherited all things.

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Ruth’s vow “was nobly promised, and it was as nobly performed; for the love that inspired the words was not like a thorn blaze which, bright for a moment, dies down into darkness, but rather like the glow of the sunshine, which lasts through all the day.”—William M. Taylor.

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“Ruth’s was particularly a filial faithfulness, and as such should be emulated by the young. In her example Ruth eloquently repeats God’s command and promise, **‘Honor thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.’** “—Ross C. Houghton, D.D.

“WHERE THOU LODGEST, I WILL LODGE”

Ruth’s resolve is a classic in literature. Her vow has stamped itself indelibly on the heart of the Church. The beauty of its form and the utter devotion of a genuine and self-conquering love have made it a vow which never shall be forgotten so long as God lives.

- The God of the Bible was to be her God.
- The holy people of God were to be her people.

- The Canaan of God and God's people was to be her home.

To be in the center of the will of God is to be home.

- Like Ruth, we should resolve to pursue the journey to the end;
- Like Ruth, we should cast our lot with the separated and sanctified people of God;
- Like Ruth, should cleave to the God of the Bible and the God of the Hebrews;
- Like Ruth we should enter God's field and serve;
- Like Ruth, we should abandon ourselves to our benign and glorious Boaz and stay at His feet until the morning.

“THY GOD SHALL BE MY GOD”

“Intreat me not to leave thee . . . for whither thou goest, I will go . . . thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God.” As an expression of love and loyalty these words cannot be surpassed. Here is supreme devotion. Here is love to the uttermost. The secret, however, of such love and loyalty is kinship in the things of the soul and eternity, **“Thy God shall be my God.”** There can be no true love and no lasting loyalty without this kinship of soul and spirit.

“THY PEOPLE SHALL BE MY PEOPLE”

Two points are here perfectly plain. Ruth realized that in order to enjoy Canaan and its fruits and possess the land in its fullness she must:

(1) Make the God of Naomi, the God of the Hebrews, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of Israel, the God of the Bible, the God of holiness, the holy God of the holy Bible, her one and only, true and living God, and

(2) Make God's holy people, God's separated people, God's peculiar people, God's persecuted people, her people.

Ruth realized that she could not go with a holy God without also going with the holy people of God. She understood that if she would have the God of the Bible as her God she must separate herself from the giddy, giggling, gaudy, godless crowd. The holy people were to be her people, and a holy God, her God. It is impossible to fellowship with God and refuse fellowship with the people of God.

“THY GOD MY GOD”

The famine had done its worst. Elimelech and his two sons were dead. Ruth was a widow, poor, and, for aught we know to the contrary, all she possessed of earthly goods was the clothes which she wore. It is no disgrace, however, to be honestly poor. Without any arm upon which to lean except that of a widowed mother-in-law, she nevertheless possessed that which money cannot buy. She was modest and virtuous and lovable. Her decision was prompt, firm, determined and final. Her earthly and worldly associations were sacrificed; her mind was made up and her heart was fixed: **“Thy God shall be my God.”**

This is just what each and every wise person should be ready to say. There must be complete detachment from all worldly friendships and associations and a complete attachment to Jesus Christ. Old relationships with the old crowd must cease and a new relationship must begin, **“Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God.”**

There must be a detachment and a disavowal of the customs, fashions, foibles, ways and methods of Moab, a complete cutting loose from old ties, old ways, old pleasures, and old life conduct and conversation, and there must be a realignment of one’s self with the people of God as well as with God, and with God as well as with the people of God. We cannot go with a holy God and fellowship with unholy people.

To love God is to love the brethren, unite with them and fellowship with them. Having made her decision, what rich surprises were in store for Ruth. Yes, and there are just as rich and just as wonderful surprises in store for all who will make the God of the Bible their God, and God’s holy people their people. Ruth never had cause to regret her decision, and we may be sure that she does not regret it now.

“WHERE THOU DIEST, WILL I DIE”

Sometimes it is difficult to decide where one man’s quality exceeds another. For a long time they seem to be equal, but a critical moment arrives, and at that moment the real quality of the man is determined. Orpah loved Naomi and for a time there seemed to be little difference between Orpah and Ruth, but when the moment of decision arrived, the difference was manifest. Orpah might kiss and weep, but Ruth resolved to live and die in God’s country with God’s people, and with Naomi.

“AND THERE WILL I BE BURIED”

Weeping ended for Ruth when her will was surrendered and she resolved to live and die in God’s country and be buried among God’s people. Ruth’s decision to go to Bethlehem (*the house of bread*) and dwell in the land of Canaan (*rest*) terminated her own miseries. Orpah might weep, but from the moment of Ruth’s decision neither crying nor sorrow is recorded in connection with Ruth.

Decision itself is exhilarating and refreshing. Some people never know the joys and delights of a Spirit-filled religion because they never reach great decisions in favor of God and holiness, come life or death. To settle the question as to one’s death and burial is to stop a lot of unnecessary bawling at the mourner’s bench, and, instead, weep for those that are still in need of Him.

“SHE WAS STEADFASTLY MINDED”

Decisive characters are seldom the subjects of continued despair. Orpah might kiss and weep and Naomi might desire to change her name from “pleasant” to “bitter,” but Ruth did not join in the chorus. Ruth had settled the question as to (1) her God; (2) her people; (3) her living; (4) her dying; and (5) her funeral.

“Some girls are built that way,” Billy Sunday once said. To win Christ and win heaven one must be steadfastly minded. Something more than mere human or creaturely kindness is essential if we would make heaven our home. We must be steadfastly minded to repent, believe, consecrate and enter Canaan, or we shall fall by the wayside and, like Orpah, go back to the old ways, old friends and old gods.

The heart of Ruth was fixed. She was steadfastly minded. Unlike the double-minded Orpah, she was not unstable in her ways. Forgetting the things behind, Ruth pressed toward the mark for the prize—”**steadfastly minded.**”

* * *

“We cannot hope to contribute to literature a sentence so exquisite and so thrilling as that into which Ruth poured the full measure of a noble heart, but we can imitate her in devotion — the brightest jewel in her crown.” —William Jennings Bryan.

* * *

“Ruth puts the whole tribe of daughters-in-law to shame by her consideration of Naomi. I wish we could get the lesson to take root. There is not enough consideration given mothers-in-law. They are the mothers of our wives and our husbands.”— Len G. Broughton, D.D.

“IS THIS NAOMI?” (1:19)

The word Naomi means “*pleasant.*” That is what all men and women should be in the land of Canaan. “**Her ways are ways of pleasantness.**”

It is just too bad that so many women are nasty, mean, gossipy, tittle-tattlers. The trouble with many is much deeper than the thyroid gland. It is amazing how unpleasant, contemptible and devilish some women become. In these days of stress and strain, hurry and scurry, hustle and bustle, restlessness and unease, turmoil, and strife, it behooves all girls and women to watch their ways and their words, and make themselves behave and be pleasant.

Give God a chance to steady the nerves, talk to the heart, sweeten the disposition and make you a pleasant and pure, wholesome and happy Christian. Refuse to bring disgrace and discredit to the cause of Christ, holiness and the Church by unpleasantness on your part, regardless of how you feel or how others treat you.

The home of Elimelech was hopelessly wrecked; his boys married heathen, godless girls; his wife was made a widow; his children were made fatherless; and he himself died outside of God’s land and God’s will.

The funeral procession, the mound-covered grave, a weeping widow and two fatherless boys should warn us against the danger of departing from God or stepping from the path of strict conformity to His holy will.

Ten years in Moab had made its mark on Naomi. Her old-time, old-fashioned Canaan friends were amazed at the change. Moab is the land of bitterness, misery, want and woe. She went out full but was made empty in Moab. Bitter in soul, confused in mind and weary in body she returned to the land of Canaan, and her old friends with whom she had fellowshiped could scarcely believe their own eyes. It is a bitter thing to backslide.

Naomi is therefore an outstanding typical backslider. She never intended to go very far in disobedience (1: 1-5); she allowed her children to marry heathen companions, blamed God for her bitter predicament and was partly responsible for the declension of Orpah (1:8-18). Others noticed the change in her appearance and carriage and cried, **“Is this Naomi?”**

Backsliding brings bitterness, and others notice the change.

Ten years of wandering outside of God’s land, God’s will and God’s ways had evidently aged and somewhat soured the once charming and pleasant Naomi.

The town gossips, watching the way-worn, weary women entering Bethlehem, began a buzz of questions and answers. There was wonder, curiosity, concern and perhaps pity expressed in the words, **“Is this Naomi?”** Is this the pleasant and popular wife of Elimelech? Is this the mother of Mahlon? Is this aged and weary widow the once happy and winsome wife of the once elegant Elimelech? Is this Naomi? Ah, beloved, ten years of backsliding make a tremendous difference!

“CALL ME MARA”

“Is this Naomi?” (*pleasant*). **“Call me Mara”** (*bitter*).

That is the story in the life of every wanderer from the way of holiness. Moab had evidently made its marks on the cheeks of the once happy Naomi. **“Is this Naomi?”** Is this the nimble Naomi who once jumped for joy in the house of the Lord? **“Is this Naomi?”** **“Call me Mara.”**

Bitter indeed is the path of the backslider. The land of backsliding is still a land of bitterness.

Naomi and her steadfastly minded daughter-in-law had pressed their way to Bethlehem. The city was moved about them. The prodigal daughter had returned, but, oh, what a change! Ten years of wandering and backslidings had wrinkled her brow and saddened the face. **“Is this Naomi?”** they said to one another. **“Is this Naomi?”** **“Is this Naomi?”** **“Is this Naomi?”** Naomi was conscious of their criticism and cried, **“Call me not Naomi [*pleasant*]; call me Mara [*bitter*].”** Yes! it is a bitter thing to depart from God. Unfortunately, like all backsliders who have failed God, Naomi blamed God for her sorrow and sufferings. Instead of blaming her past backslidings for her present bitteresses she blamed God: **“The Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me.”** It was not the Almighty at all. It was her own miserable backslidings. It was the result of going her own way. It was the natural consequences of her disobedience. The bitterness about which she complained was brought about through her own backslidings during a period of ten long years; and yet she blamed God. Adam blamed the woman, the woman blamed the serpent and Naomi blamed God.

“I WENT OUT FULL”

In God’s presence there is fullness. No man can stay ground where God is, and be empty.

- Barnabas was full of the Holy Ghost.
- Stephen was full of faith.
- Dorcas was full of good works.
- The seven deacons were full of wisdom.

Naomi’s own testimony of her past in the land of perfection and plenty was, **“I went out full.”**

Surely she **“went out full.”**

- She was a dweller in the delightful land of promise.
- Her home was in Bethlehem, the house of bread.
- She had a shouting-happy experience for she belonged to Judah (*praise*).

She enjoyed her inheritance and possessed her possessions, and if she had remained true to God, if she had watched and prayed, payed her tithe, read the Bible and regularly attended the worship of the Lord, she would still have been full.

She listened to others however. She was unduly influenced by others and with them forsook the God of her fathers and the land of her father’s for the tall grass and fat cows of Moab. She went out full. Canaan is a good land. Grapes, figs, pomegranates, corn, milk and honey are healthful, nourishing and fattening, but she forsook them all for the flesh pots of Moab. She went out full and, like the Prodigal, she came home a pauper.

“THE LORD HATH BROUGHT ME HOME AGAIN”

How kind of the Lord! How good and gracious! How tender and true, merciful and mighty!

- He brought Adam out of the bushes behind which he was hiding.
- He redeemed Israel with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm.
- He welcomed the prodigal but penitent son,
- He here brings back the penitent daughter Naomi.

Home! What a happy word. Home! Canaan is the homeland of the people of God. Abraham was called out of Ur of the Chaldees to go into Canaan; Jacob found neither peace nor rest outside of the Promised Land. Moses led the people out of Egypt to go into the land of Canaan. Finally Joshua led the people across the Jordan into Canaan’s fruitful land. Christ was born in Canaan. Canaan is God’s land for God’s people. Canaan is God’s will and God’s place for God’s people.

It is home. To be in the center and the circle of the will of God is to be at home. Holiness is not something alien; it is home. Sanctification is not something extra like syrup on buttered toast; it is home. Salvation to the uttermost is the soul’s sanctum sanctorum. The Lord brought Naomi home. She never would have seen home again had the Lord left her alone. No man would ever get back to God and holiness if left to himself.

“HOME AGAIN EMPTY”

Empty. Home again but empty. How expressive! How instructive! **“I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home again empty.”** **“Full . . . empty.”**

Herein is the story of an Old Testament prodigal daughter. Home again but empty. Once full but now empty. Here is the story and the inevitable end of ten years of backslidings — empty. Home but empty. Home again but empty. Full—that is Canaan. Empty —that is Moab.

“I WENT OUT FULL, AND”

Nearness to God is rest, peace, purity and plenty. Distance from God means disappointment, distress, despair and death.

To go away from God is to go away from the Supreme Good. To depart from God, to fail to walk in the light, is to depart from both fullness and freedom. Barnabas was full of the Holy Ghost; Stephen was full of faith; Dorcas was full of good works; the Romans were full of goodness; the seven deacons were full of wisdom; the apostles on the Day of Pentecost were full of the Holy Spirit; and Naomi testified to fullness in the fair land of Canaan until she failed God and fainted in the way.

Disobedience was followed by departure, distress, disease and death. Trouble upon trouble and sorrow upon sorrow followed the footsteps of Naomi. Neither peace, rest nor hope could be found in Moab. Indeed, there is no rest and no fullness outside of Canaan. Neither faith nor fullness can possibly be obtained in Moab.

Orpah, Ruth and Naomi are three typical or representative women. Orpah started from Moab, but was easily persuaded to go back to her old ways, her old sins and her old worship. She bites at the bait to return, for it is but the expression of her own desires. Like Pliable in *Pilgrim's Progress*, she started but soon stopped.

Like Demas, she loved this present evil world. Unfortunately the Orpahs, Pliables and Demases are still with us. Ruth was like the limpet which clings to the rock, while Orpah was like a piece of wreckage tossed about by the waves.

“THE LORD . . . IS . . . AGAINST ME”

Naomi was sadly mistaken. The hand of the Lord had not gone out against her. Her own backslidings had blinded her and made her bitter. Naomi had become sour in her soul. A sour backslider is much worse than a sinner. All backsliders are liable to misunderstand the ways of God, and misjudge the plans of a kindly Providence.

The trouble was not with God but with Naomi. The trouble is not in the Church but in us, if we are away from God.

“Great was the surprise of her friends to see her in so altered a condition. She was so broken by her afflictions, and so reduced in circumstances, that they could scarcely believe their own eyes, or think that this was the same person whom they had formerly seen so fresh, and fair, and gay. And so it may be with any one of us. How great a change may a few years make in our condition!”—Ashton Oxenden.

“THE ALMIGHTY HATH AFFLICTED ME” (1:20-21)

The confession of Naomi here is threefold:

- **“The Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me”;**
- **“The Lord hath testified against me”;**
- **“The Almighty hath afflicted me.”**

All the dealings of God with Naomi were for her own good and His own glory. She was a happy wife and mother in Bethlehem.

“She went out full,” and the bitterness about which she complains was because of her own backslidings. It is so easy to blame God and other believers for our own backsliding and bitterness.

The Lord’s chastisement is intended to correct and save, for He doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men. Naomi’s backsliding had partly blinded her as well as made her bitter. It is a fearful thing to fail God.

“IN THE BEGINNING OF BARLEY HARVEST”

It is always the beginning of better days when backslidings cease and we return to Canaan’s happy land.

Naomi came home empty but she was in time to help with the harvest. There was yet opportunity for service if she desired to serve. She was empty but in Bethlehem it was the beginning of barley harvest, and better days were about to dawn for the now chastened and humbled Naomi.

~ end of chapter 2 ~

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