

## "THY PEOPLE SHALL BE MY PEOPLE."

– RUTH 1:16-22 – DECEMBER 7 –

"Be kindly affectioned one toward another." – Rom. 12:10.

WHILE THE BOOK OF RUTH is not prophetic, but merely historical, it is valuable to us in various ways. (1) It furnishes an important link in the chronological chain leading down to King David and, hence, a part of the chronological line leading down to the Man Christ Jesus. (2) It gives a glimpse of the habits and customs of the Israelites in general as an agricultural people. In this respect it is in marked contrast with the Books of Judges, Kings and Chronicles, which dealt more particularly with the rulers, generals and wars. (3) The story of Ruth points a very beautiful lesson of fidelity, sympathy and love amongst the people at that time, and inculcates a similar lesson of kindness of disposition amongst the spiritual Israelites, guaranteeing them, along this line, blessings both for the present and for the future.

Somewhere about Gideon's time, when scarcity amounting almost to famine prevailed in Palestine, as a judgment of the Lord upon his people for some measure of coldness or unfaithfulness to him and to their covenant, Naomi's husband determined to emigrate with his family to the other side of the Dead Sea – to the land of Moab. The Moabites were the descendants of Lot, but, nevertheless, the Lord marked out to his people Israel that they were not to be considered the children of Abraham – that they were not fellow-heirs of the promises made to Abraham, and, therefore, they were not subjects of special dealings, disciplines, providences, etc., as were the Israelites. Naomi and her two sons went with her husband apparently without regret, to the land of Moab, hoping thereby to better the prospects of the family. It was a mistake, however, as she afterwards realized, to attempt to regulate their own affairs when they were specially under the Lord's protection and guidance.

As Israelites they should have esteemed the divine promises so highly that they would not have left the land of promise and the people of promise to commingle with those who were strangers to those promises and more or less idolaters. To be on the Lord's side amongst the Lord's people should have been esteemed far more important than earthly prospects. Naomi, however, is not to blame in connection with this matter; the responsibility rested with her husband, and it is evident that her heart was never fully in sympathy with the move, because about ten years subsequently, when her husband and two sons died, she promptly determined on a return to the Lord's people and to the land which he had given them.

Human nature is much the same everywhere and always. How many there are to-day who mistakenly seek to map out their plans for the present life in disregard of their highest interests, in disregard of the Lord's promises and the relationship which they have entered into by covenant with him! How many there are who forget that the Lord's arrangement with all of **[R3110 : page 350]** his covenant people is that he will supervise their affairs and cause all things to work together for good to them! Instead of making temporal interests the chief concern, Naomi's husband should have been making the religious interests of himself and family his chief concern, so that if he had been living in Moab under greater prosperity, he should rather have been willing to go into the land of promise amongst the Lord's people, though such a course would seem to mean a blighting of some of his earthly interests.

The Lord's people of Spiritual Israel will do well to bear this thought continually in mind – that spiritual interests are to be given the preference always; that temporal affairs are to be managed and controlled from the standpoint of the everlasting welfare; – from the standpoint of spiritual growth and development and prosperity; – from the standpoint of the best interests and influences upon their children. They should not only hesitate to follow any suggestion that would take themselves and their families into unfavorable, godless surroundings, but they should determine that not under any consideration would they

follow such a [R3111 : page 350] suggestion; – that on the contrary the Lord's people should be their people, even though this meant less of the comforts and luxuries of this present life: it would surely mean greater spiritual blessings and favors for the present time, and persevering would mean the gaining of the glorious reward which our Lord has promised to the faithful who love him more than they love houses and lands and kindred, etc.

Evidently Naomi's life and example and her faithfulness to the Lord had made an impression amongst those with whom she was specially in contact, – her two daughters-in-law, both of whom resolved to go back with her to the land of Canaan. On the journey, however, she reflected that these two young women would be sacrificing much – leaving kindred, homes, acquaintances, customs, and good prospects to go with her to a land where they would be considered foreigners and probably be discriminated against. She, therefore, urged them to return to their own people, to the religious worship, etc., to which they had been accustomed. She feared that their resolution to accompany her would result in disappointment later on. Her disinterested course in this matter reminds us very much of our Lord's words to some who proposed to become his disciples. He advised them first of all to sit down and count the cost; this he did, not because he wished to stumble or to turn back any who had inclinations to follow in his footsteps, but because it is best on general principles that people should not undertake that in which their hearts are not fully and deeply interested; because, otherwise, they are sure to make a failure. They who sit down and count the cost and then rejoicingly follow in the Lord's footsteps of suffering and trial, glad to be accounted worthy to suffer for his name's sake, and to walk in his footsteps, – they alone are the kind who will gain the prize. Those who would follow without the spirit of sacrifice would be sure to miss the prize, and all the sacrificing they might do would be burdensome and measurably disappointing.

Naomi's argument appealed to one of her daughters-in-law, who did return to her Moabitish home, concluding that after all it would be too much of a sacrifice for her to part with her kindred, etc. Ruth, on the contrary, had come to love her mother-in-law so deeply and to respect her religion so thoroughly that although it cost a tear to part with home and kindred and to contemplate the trials of poverty in a foreign land, she, nevertheless, fully resolved that such a home amongst those who revered the true God and were heirs of his promises was more to be esteemed than anything she was leaving. Her impassioned words to her mother-in-law are noted throughout the world as being amongst the most beautiful expressions of sympathy, kindness and devotion. Some one has arranged them in poetic form, thus: –

"Entreat me not to leave thee,  
And to return from following after thee;  
For whither thou goest, I will go;  
And where thou lodgest, I will lodge;  
Thy people shall be my people,  
And thy God, my God;  
Where thou diest I will die, and there will I be buried.  
The Lord do so to me, and more also,  
If aught but death part thee and me." – Vs. 16,17.

A good and faithful, God-fearing, God-serving, God-honoring mother-in-law, Naomi surely was, to have so deeply interested Ruth in herself and in her God and in his promises to her people. There is a lesson here, not only for mothers-in-law, but for all of the Lord's people. Not all are able to preach and to teach the Word of God publicly or privately, but all can teach through their daily lives and glorify their Father in heaven in their bodies and spirits which are his, by living a godly life, by telling in the simplest manner of the hopes and promises which control their own hearts and inspire their own courage and devotion. The Apostle Paul had in mind this same thought of the general influence of life and character when he said, "Ye are manifestly

declared to be the epistle of Christ." Our Lord had the same thought in mind when he declared, "Ye are the light of the world....Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." That Naomi had told her [R3111 : page 351] daughters-in-law respecting her God and his promises to his people is evident; but to have told them of this and not to have acted and spoken and lived in accord with this faith and hope, would have been contradictory and, undoubtedly, never would have influenced Ruth to forsake her own people and her father's house, and to cast in her lot with her mother-in-law and the Israelites.

Arrived at her home city, Bethlehem, Naomi, who had been well known ten years before, and whose friends probably never expected to see her again, was greeted by her name; but she replied, Call me no longer Naomi (which signifies lovable, pleasant), but call me rather Marah (which signifies bitter). She explained to them that the Lord's providences in respect to her affairs had been severe afflictions; – the Lord had testified against her course – had not prospered herself and family in the course they had taken. No doubt later on she came to see that the Lord's afflictions upon her had really been for her good, bringing her back to the land of promise and to fellowship with her people, so that her last days were probably the best of her life.

So at times it may be with some of the Lord's spiritual Israelites; his chastisements and afflictions and disciplines may seem to indicate his displeasure, but really, from the standpoint of faith and knowledge, they may afterward be seen to have been blessings in disguise. However, much depends upon the way in which the Lord's disciplines are received. Had Naomi suffered herself to become sour and morose and rebellious against the Lord, no blessing would have followed her trying experiences; but the fact that she permitted these to draw her closer to the Lord and to his people formed the channel of her blessings. And this lesson also is easily applied by us all as spiritual Israelites to our experiences.

The remainder of the lesson gives us an insight into the customs of the time, and incidentally shows us how the Lord rewarded the noble character and faith of Ruth. That she did not come to Bethlehem with great expectations and selfish motives is evidenced by the fact that she set out to earn a living for herself and her mother-in-law. She was young and strong, and could, after the manner of the times, go into the harvest fields and glean such stray handfuls of the grain as were missed by the men who did the reaping. This was permitted by the Jewish law; the grain growing in the fence corners might be gathered by any of the poor for their own use. Providentially Ruth was guided in her humble efforts to make a living, to the field of a man who was a kinsman to Naomi, and to whom she (Ruth) was subsequently married and became one of the mothers in Israel, from whom descended King David and ultimately Mary, the mother of Jesus.

It is well that the Lord's people note even in this little incident something that may be helpful to them. We are to commit our way to the Lord and sincerely and unselfishly determine to follow the path of righteousness; then the Lord shall be our God; then his people shall be our people. Testings will come as to whether or not we are willing to do our duty in respect to the common affairs of life, laboring with our hands, providing things honest in the sight of all men. As we go forward in the line of duty, the Lord guides our steps and overrules in our affairs and brings us blessings, but if we fail to take the proper steps and to do with our might what our hands find to do, we miss the blessings.

The fact that these two women could journey from Moab to Bethlehem by themselves and without molestation, and the fact that Ruth, unknown and unprotected, could safely glean in the fields without interference of any kind, speaks to us strongly of the general law and order prevalent amongst the Israelites – the general recognition of the divine law and the general conformity thereto. We are to remember, too, that at this time the laws were liberally administered, and that, so far as we are made aware, there was neither army or police

organization to enforce them. The people were comparatively free and evidently in some respects moral, noble and trustworthy. This is illustrated further in the course of Boaz. How few employers of labor to-day, as they visit their farms, would be in any degree inclined to salute their laborers as Boaz did his; saying, "The Lord be with you!" And how few farm laborers of to-day would respond as did these of Boaz; – "They answered him, The Lord bless thee." Evidently the employers and employees of our day could learn some profitable lessons from the past, notwithstanding the fact that Evolutionists would endeavor to convince us that back in the days of Boaz men must have been much nearer the monkey condition than to-day. The facts are to the contrary.

Furthermore, we notice the generosity of Boaz, that instead of dealing selfishly and miserly in respect to the gleanings of the woman, he gave directions to his servants that they purposely let fall an occasional handful when binding the grain, that Ruth's gleanings might thus be enlarged. Christian employers and employees need not to go back to the Jewish Law and to the customs of the Jews as illustrated by Boaz and his laborers; for we have a still higher law and much **[R3112 : page 351]** advantage every way over them. If their knowledge of the Lord led them to kindly salutations and kindly actions, much more should the Christian's greater knowledge of the divine will and his anointing of the holy spirit enable him to be kind, considerate and affectionate toward others – doing good unto all men as we have opportunity, especially to the household of faith.

Our Golden Text is an exhortation to spiritual Israelites and is in full accord with the sentiments of this lesson as witnessed by the conduct of Naomi and Ruth and Boaz and his laborers. Let us with increasing light and knowledge and privilege make still further progress in all the fruits of the spirit of love.

Finally, – It is unsafe to neglect to have the Lord for our God, and to neglect to make his people our people. Acceptance of the Lord

means ultimately a change in all of life's interests and affairs if we would abide in his love and favor. The sacrifice of earthly things may cost us tears and heart-aches at first; but eventually we will be more than compensated – as was Ruth, only in higher, spiritual blessings.

