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KING DAVID'S GREAT-GRANDMOTHER

– FEBRUARY 7. – RUTH 1. –

A BEAUTIFUL STORY – ISRAEL'S HOME LIFE –
BENEATH THE SURFACE – GOOD PEOPLE ASTRAY –
NAOMI'S RETURN – RUTH'S CONVERSION – WHAT IT COST
HER – WHAT SHE GOT.

**"Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God."
– Ruth 1:16.**

IT is said that when Benjamin Franklin was American Minister in Paris, he spent an evening with some of its literary people, during which he was called upon to contribute to the entertainment. Drawing from his pocket a manuscript prepared for the occasion, he remarked, "Reading a very ancient book, I came across a very charming bit of literature, which I believe will [R5614 : page 23] prove as interesting to many of you as to myself. I have copied it; and if you will permit, I will read it." It was the story of our lesson – indeed, the entire story of the Book of Ruth. The narrative tells that the audience was delighted and desired to be informed where in ancient history so beautiful and idealistic a tale could be found. They were more than surprised when he told them that he had copied it from the Bible; for France at that time, in its official and literary circles, was agnostic, if not atheistic.

The story of the Book of Ruth gives us a little glimpse into the affairs of the Israelites, showing us that there was a deep spirit of religion underlying the surface of wars and captivities, etc., which naturally most impress themselves upon our attention in every history of every people. The opening was at Bethlehem, "the city of David," where centuries later Jesus was born, "David's Son and David's Lord." The religious sentiment of the family is shown by the

import of their names. Elimelech, the husband's name, signifies "My God is King." His wife's name, Naomi, is said to mean "The pleasure of Jehovah." They had two young sons, Mahlon (sickly one) and Chilion (pining one).

They became discouraged because of the invasions of their enemies and the frequent loss of the fruits of their labor, and finally, because of a severe drouth, which almost produced a famine, they left their home, crossed Jordan into the land of Moab, and dwelt there for ten years. There the two boys married. Both died, leaving widows; and Elimelech died. Evidently the leaving of the Land of Promise, the Land of the Covenant, to live amongst a people who were idolators, and who were not in covenant relationship with God in any way, had not resulted greatly to the benefit of the family; for when Naomi concluded to return to her native land, she had practically nothing.

It is worth while here for us to learn a lesson to the effect that it is never good policy to sacrifice our religious interests for our temporal interests. With all Christians the motto should be "God First." It will not do to say that perhaps they moved to Moab that they might do a little missionary work; for although the Moabites were the descendants of Lot, and therefore related to the Israelites and had spoken to some extent the same language, nevertheless God's Covenant was merely with the descendants of Abraham, and the others were aliens, strangers, foreigners, from the commonwealth of Israel, like all other Gentiles. Nor would it have been proper for them to attempt to convert the Moabites; for God had not called the Moabites, but merely the Israelites – as we read, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth." – Amos 3:2.

However, many Christians have made the same mistake that this family made; and if Christians indeed, they were all the more responsible, because the Christian has a higher relationship with God and should have a clearer knowledge of His will and more of the

"spirit of a sound mind." It was unwise to take two boys into a heathen land, where they were likely to be contaminated; instead, every reasonable influence should have been thrown about them to preserve their loyalty to Jehovah.

Doubtless Naomi realized all this, as indicated by her words in the lesson, "It grieveth me much for your sakes that the hand of the Lord is gone out against me." Here again we perceive that the hand of the Lord against her was really in her favor, and that it had a proper influence upon her and brought her back to the Land of Promise.

TWO BEAUTIFUL CHARACTERS

Naomi (the pleasure of Jehovah) must have been a beautiful character. This is evidenced by the deep affection manifested toward her by her two daughters-in-law. They both preferred to join her and to go to her homeland, to leave their own home associations; and they started with her. But as she reflected that they would be strangers in a strange land and would pine for home, even as she was pining now, she tenderly urged them to reconsider – to go back to their home and kindred, their habits and customs, and to remarry, etc.

One of them so concluded, and kissed her good-bye; but the other one, Ruth, broke forth in such eloquent terms that her words have become permanently identified with classic literature:

"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."

When we say that Ruth was converted, we of course do not mean that she became a Christian or that she became an heir of Christian promises; for there were none such until after Jesus, by His death, opened up the "new and living way" beyond the Veil. She was converted to Judaism, and this is a fresh testimony to the faithful living of Naomi. – Verses 16,17.

THE VALUE OF POSITIVE DECISION

One thing here is worthy of note; namely, the positiveness with which Ruth made her decision. It was not a proposal to try for a time how it would go to live in Judea. It was a decision unto death. In this respect all true conversions are alike. The Christian, for instance, did not really become a Christian until he made just such a definite, positive consecration of himself to leave the world, its affairs, its loves, its hopes and ambitions, and to spend and be spent even unto death in the service of the Lord. The value of positive decision in respect to life we can hardly overestimate. Thousands of lives are blighted because of lack of decision. Positiveness for God is the only condition in which we can hope to "make our calling and election sure."

True to God's promise to the Jewish people, Naomi and Ruth were blessed in their return to the Lord – to His people – to His Land of Covenant and Promise. We are to remember that all the promises to Fleshly Israel were earthly, while all those to Spiritual Israel are Heavenly. **[R5614 : page 24]**

Both the nobility and the wisdom of Naomi's character are manifest in the course which she pursued on arriving in Bethlehem practically penniless, and unable to retrieve the interest of her husband and her sons in their share of the land. She did not beg, nor request Ruth to beg. There was no false cry nor false modesty. Ruth went out, like other poor women, to glean handfuls of grain after the

reapers. Under the Law it was a part of God's provision for the poor that no one should reap the corners of his field, but should leave these for the poor. Naomi counseled Ruth to go gleaning in the fields of one of her wealthy relatives, named Boaz.

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As Naomi had surmised, the wealthy Boaz took note of the modest young woman who daily gleaned in his fields; and subsequently he learned that she was a relative through marriage. He pursued the course of the Jewish Law, and Ruth became his wife. Obed was the name of their son, Jesse was the name of his son, and David was the youngest of Jesse's sons. Thus Ruth the Gentile became identified with the royal family as an ancestor, and with King David's greatest Son and Lord – Jesus.

The Bible is a very honest Book. It does not disguise the fact that Rahab, the harlot of Jericho, was received into the Jewish nation by marriage and became an ancestor to King David, Solomon and Jesus. It does not disguise the fact that Ruth was by nature a foreigner, a Gentile, and at one time an idolatress. No other book is so honest. Similarly the New Testament, with wonderful candor, tells all the details of how one of His own disciples betrayed the Master, of how all forsook Him and fled, of how the subsequently noble St. Peter denied his Master with curses, of how St. Peter and St. John, when preaching in the Temple, were perceived by the people to be ignorant and unlearned.

Similarly the weaknesses and sins of King David and others of the royal family are in no sense covered or disguised. They are all laid bare and reprov'd, their punishments stated, and the repentance of the culprits noted. We dare trust such honest writers, even as in the history of today we would be willing to trust such writers. Indeed, we do not know of any history today that would compare with the Bible history in candor.

HOW TO BECOME A CHRISTIAN

In these Studies we make no attempt at impassioned appeal; but rather, in the words of Jesus, we suggest that each one, when considering whether or not he will join himself to the Lord, become a follower of Christ, shall first quietly "sit down and count the cost," as the Master directed. We do, however, earnestly urge the importance of decision, and a positive decision, as being essential to proper peace of mind and to proper Christian progress, and to an inheritance with the saints under the terms of this Gospel Age. – Colossians 1:12.

Those who do conclude to give their hearts to God should know that "there is no other name given under Heaven or amongst men" whereby we can be recovered to God's favor, so as to be permitted to enter the House of Sons, than the name of Jesus. In His name means in, by and through all that His name stands for to have faith in God, obedience to His terms, etc. But when the decision is reached, it means, "Thy God shall be my God."

Decision is reached to join the House of Sons through Christ. Be it noticed that we have not recommended the joining of any denomination, nor does the Bible. The instruction of the Bible is that each, to be a member of the House of Sons, must be joined to the Lord – to Christ, and through Him to the Father – in order to be an heir of God and a joint-heir with Jesus Christ. Such as **[R5615 : page 24]** do this have their names written, not on an earthly roll of membership, but "in the Lamb's Book of Life," "whose names are written in Heaven."

Their next step should be to say, "Thy people shall be my people." And so surely as any of God's people are found, they are all brethren of one family, whether they be found amongst Roman Catholics or Baptists, amongst Methodists or Presbyterians, amongst Lutherans or Anglicans, or whether they be found outside of all denominations. God's people are all one, because by one Spirit they

are all baptized into the one Spiritual Body, the Head of which is Christ, whose Spirit must pervade all His members. – 1 Corinthians 12:13.

Not only should we seek for the people of God, but we should acknowledge and fellowship them, whether they be white or black, rich or poor, learned or ignorant; for "ye are all one in Christ Jesus," and "One is your Master, even Christ."

The proper course for all those who come into Christ is to inquire for and search out "the old paths" – the footsteps of Jesus and the Apostles, their teachings, their practises – and not to be influenced by modern digressions, philosophies and sciences falsely so-called, or by creeds and theories of the Dark Ages. "They shall all be taught of God" is a promise which belongs to the entire Household of Faith; and the Word of God is "meat in due season," and is the strength provided for their strengthening, upbuilding and preparation for a share in the Kingdom.

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