

# PEOPLE OF THE HOLY BIBLE

*10. Ruth Deciding for God*

**C. H. Spurgeon**

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***“And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, or 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”*** Ruth 1:16.

This was a very brave, outspoken confession of faith. Please notice that it was made by a woman, a young woman, a poor woman, a widow woman, and a foreigner. Remembering all that, I should think there is no condition of gentleness, or of obscurity, or of poverty, or of sorrow, which should prevent anybody from making an open confession of allegiance to God when faith in the Lord Jesus Christ has been exercised. If that is your experience, then whoever you may be, you will find an opportunity, somewhere or other, of declaring that you are on the Lord’s side. I am glad that all candidates for membership in our church make their confession of faith at our church meetings. It does the man, the woman, the boy, or the girl, whoever it is, so much good for once, at least, to say right out straight, “I am a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, and I am not ashamed of it,” that I do not think we shall ever deviate from our custom. I have also noticed that, when people have once confessed Christ before men, they are very apt to do it again somewhere else; and they thus acquire a kind of boldness and outspokenness upon religious matters, and a holy courage as followers of Christ, which more than make up for any self-denial and trembling which the effort may have cost them.

I think Naomi was quite right to drive Ruth, as it were, to take this brave stand, in which it became an absolute necessity for her to speak right straight out, and say, in the words of our text, “Intreat me not to leave thee, or 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.” What is there for any of us to be ashamed of in acknowledging that we belong to the Lord Jesus Christ? What can there be that should cause us to be ashamed of Jesus, or make us blush to own his name?

***“Ashamed of Jesus! that dear Friend  
On whom my hopes of heaven depend!  
No; when I blush, be this my shame,  
That I no more revere his name.”***

We ought to be ashamed of being ashamed of Jesus; we ought to be afraid of being afraid to own him; we ought to tremble at trembling to confess him, and to resolve that we will take all suitable opportunities that we can find of saying, first to relatives, and then to all others with whom we come into contact, “We serve the Lord Christ.”

I should think that Naomi was — certainly she ought to have been — greatly cheered by hearing this declaration from Ruth, especially the last part of it: “Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God.” Naomi had suffered great temporal loss; she had lost her husband and her two sons; but now she had found the soul of her daughter-in-law; and I believe that, according to the scales of true judgment, there ought to have been more joy in her heart at the conversion of Ruth’s soul than grief over the death of her husband and her sons. Our Lord Jesus has told us that “there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth;” and I always understand, by that expression, that there is joy in the heart of God himself over every sinner’s repentance. Well, then, if Naomi’s husband and sons were true believers — if they had been walking aright before the Lord — as, let us hope, they had done — she need not have felt such sorrow for them as could at all compare with the joy of her daughter-in-law being saved.

Perhaps, some of you have had bereavements in your homes; but if the death — the temporal death — of one should be the means of the spiritual life of another, there is a clear gain, I am sure there is; and though you may have gone weeping to the grave, yet, if you have evidence that, with those tears, there were also tears of repentance on the part of others of your family, and with that sad glance into the grave there was also a believing look at the dying, risen, and living Saviour, you are decidedly a gainer, and you need not say, with Naomi, “I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home again empty.” Really Naomi, with her converted daughter-in-law at her side, if she had only been able to look into the future, might have been a happier woman than when she went away with

her husband and her boys, for now she had with her one who was to be in the direct line of the progenitors of Christ, a right royal woman; for I count that the line of Christ is the true imperial line, and that they were the most highly honoured among men and women who were in any way associated with the birth of the Saviour into this world; and Ruth, though a Moabitess, was one of those who were elected to share in this high privilege.

Another thought strikes me here; that is, that it was when Naomi returned to the land which she ought never to have left, it was when she came out from the idolatrous Moabites among whom she had, as you see, relatives, and friends, and acquaintances — it was when she said, “I will go back to my own country, and people, and God,” — that then the Lord gave her the soul of this young woman who was so closely related to her. It may be that some of you professedly Christian people have been living at a distance from God. You have not led the separated life; you have tried to be friendly with the world as well as with Christ, and your children are not growing up as you wish they would. You say that your sons are not turning out well, and that your girls are dressy, and flighty, and worldly. Do you wonder that it is so? “Oh!” you say, “I have gone a good way to try to please them, thinking that, perhaps, by so doing, I might win them for Christ.” Ah! you will never win any soul to the right by a compromise with the wrong. It is decision for Christ and his truth that has the greatest power in the family, and the greatest power in the world, too.

My first observation is, that AFFECTION FOR THE GODLY SHOULD INFLUENCE US TO GODLINESS.

It did so in this case. Affection for their godly mother-in-law influenced both Orpah and Ruth for a time, “and they said unto her, Surely we will return with thee unto thy people.” They were both drawn part of the way towards Canaan; but, alas! natural affection has not sufficient power in itself to draw anybody to decision for God. It may be helpful to that end; it may be one of the “cords of a man” and “bands of love” which God, in his infinite mercy, often uses in drawing sinners to himself; but there has to be something more than that mere human affection. Still, it ought to be of some service in leading to decision; and it is a very dreadful thing when those who have godly parents seem to be the worse rather than the

better for that fact, or when men, who have Christian wives, rebel against the light, and become all the more wicked because God has blessed their homes with godly women who speak to them lovingly and tenderly, concerning the claims of the religion of Jesus. That is a terrible state of affairs, for it ought always to be the case that our affection for godly people should help to draw us towards godliness. In Ruth's case, by the grace of God, it was the means of leading her to the decision expressed in our text, "Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God."

Many forces may be combined to bring others to this decision. First, *there is the influence of companionship*. Nobody doubts that evil company tends to make a man bad, and it is equally sure that good companionship has a tendency to influence men towards that which is good. It is a happy thing to have side by side with you one whose heart is full of love to God. It is a great blessing to have as a mother a true saint, or to have as a brother or a sister one who fears the Lord; and it is a special privilege to be linked for life, in the closest bonds, with one whose prayers may rise with ours, and whose praises may also mingle with ours. There is something about Christian companionship which must tell in the right direction unless the heart be resolutely bent on mischief.

There is something more than this, however, and that is, *the influence of admiration*. There can be no doubt whatever that Ruth looked with loving reverence and admiration upon Naomi, for she saw in her a character which won her heart's esteem and affection. The few glimpses which we have of that godly woman, in this Book of Ruth, show us that she was a most disinterested and unselfish person, not one who, because of her own great sorrow, would burden others with it, and pull them down to her own level in order that they might in some way assist her. She was one who considered the interests of others rather than her own; and all such persons are sure to win admiration and esteem. When a Christian man so lives that others see something about him which they do not perceive in themselves, that is one way in which they are often attracted towards the Christian life. When the sick Christian is patient, when the poor Christian is cheerful, when the believer in Christ is forgiving, generous, tenderhearted, sympathetic, honest, upright, then it is that observers say, "Here is something worth looking at;

whence came all this excellence?”

Nor is it only by companionship and admiration that people are won to the Saviour; there is also *the influence of instruction*. I have no doubt that Naomi gave her daughter-in-law much helpful teaching. Ruth would want to know about Naomi’s God, and Naomi would be only too glad to tell her all she knew. We should make people want to know what our religion really is, and then be ready to tell them. I have no doubt that, many a time, in the land of Moab, when her daughters-in-law ran in to see her, Naomi would begin telling them about the deliverance at the Red Sea, and how the Lord brought his people through the wilderness, and how the goodly land, which flowed with milk and honey, had been given to them by the hand of Joshua. Then she would tell them about the tabernacle and its worship, and talk to them about the lamb, and the red heifer, and the bullock, and the sin offering, and so on; and it was thus, probably, that Ruth’s heart had been won to Jehovah the God of Israel. And, perhaps, for that reason — because of Naomi’s instruction — Ruth said to her, “‘Thy people shall be my people;’ I know so much about them, that I want to be numbered with them; ‘and thy God shall be my God.’ Thou hast told me about him, what wonders he has wrought, and I have resolved to trust myself under the shadow of his wings.”

I think, too, that there was another thing which had great influence over Ruth, as it has had over a great many other people. That is, *the fear of separation*. “Ah!” said one to me, only last week, “it used to trouble me greatly when my wife went downstairs to the communion, and I had to go home, or to remain with the spectators in the gallery. I did not like to be separated from her even here; and then, sir, the thought stole over me, ‘What if I have to be divided from her forever and ever?’” I think that a similar reflection ought, with the blessing of God, to impress a good many. Young man, if you live and die impenitent, you will see your mother no more, except it be from an awful distance, with a great gulf fixed between her and you, so that she cannot cross over to you, or you go over to her. There will come a day when one shall be taken and another left; and before the great separation takes place, at the judgment seat of Christ, when there shall be a sundering made between the goats and the sheep, and between the tares and the wheat, I do implore you to

let the influence of the godly whom you love help to draw you towards decision for God and His Christ.

My time would fail me if I dwelt longer on this point, though it is a very interesting one, so I must pass on to my second observation, which is, that RESOLVES TO GODLINESS WILL BE TESTED. Ruth speaks very positively: “Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God.” This was her resolve, but it was a resolve which had already been put to the test, and had in great measure satisfactorily passed through it.

First, *it had been tested by the poverty and the sorrow of her mother-in-law*. Naomi said, “The Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me;” yet Ruth says, “Thy God shall be my God.” I like that brave resolution of the young Moabitess. Some people say, “We should like to be converted, for we want to be happy.” Yes, but suppose you knew that you would not be happy after conversion, you ought still to wish to have this God to be your God. Naomi has lost her husband, she has lost her sons, she has lost everything; she is going back penniless to Bethlehem, and yet her daughter-in-law says to her, “Thy God shall be my God.” Oh, if you can share the lot of Christians when they are in trouble, if you can take God and affliction, if you can accept Christ and a cross, then your decision to be His follower is true and real. It has been tested by the afflictions and the trials which you know belong to the people of God, yet you are content to suffer with them in taking their God to be your God, too.

Next, Ruth’s decision had been tested when *she was bidden to count the cost*. Naomi had put the whole case before her. She had told her daughter-in-law that there was no hope that she should ever bear a son who could become a husband to Ruth, and that she had better stay and find a husband in her own land. She set before her the dark side of the case — possibly too earnestly. She seemed as if she wanted to persuade her to go back, though I do not think that, in her heart she could really have wished her to do so. But, my young friend, before you say to any Christian, “Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God,” count the cost. Recollect, if you are following an evil trade, you will have to give it up; if you have formed bad habits, you will have to forsake them; and if you had bad companions, you will have to leave them. There are a great

many things which have afforded you pleasure, which must become painful to you, and must be renounced. Are you prepared to follow Christ through the mire and the slough, as well as along the high road, and down in the valley as well as upon the hills? Are you ready to carry his cross as you hope, afterwards, to share his crown? If you can stand the test in detail — such a test as Christ set before those who wanted to be his followers on earth, then is your decision a right one, but not else.

Ruth had been tried, too, by *the apparent coldness of one in whom she trusted*, and whom she had a right to trust, for Naomi did not at all encourage her; indeed, she seemed to discourage her. I am not sure that Naomi is to be blamed for that, and I am not certain that she is to be much praised. You know, it is quite possible for you to encourage people too much. I have known some encouraged in their doubts and fears till they never could get out of them. At the same time, you can certainly very easily chill inquirers and seekers. And though Naomi showed her love to Ruth, yet she did not seem to have any very great desire to bring her to follow Jehovah. This is a test that many young people find to be very trying; but this young woman said to her mother-in-law, “Intreat me not to leave thee, or 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.”

Another trial for Ruth was *the drawing back of her sister-in-law*. Orpah kissed Naomi, and left her; and you know the influence of one young person upon another when they are of the same age, or when they are related as these two were. You went to the revival meeting with a friend, and she was as much impressed as you were. She has gone back to the world, and the temptation is for you to do the same. Can you stand out against it? You two young men went to hear the same preacher, and you both felt the force of the Word; but your companion has gone back to where he used to be. Can you hold out now, and say, “I will follow Christ alone if I cannot find a companion to go with me?” If so, it is well with you.

But one of the worst trials that Ruth had was *the silence of Naomi*. I think that is what is meant, for after she had solemnly declared that she would follow the Lord, we read, “When she saw that she was steadfastly minded to go with her, then she left



speaking unto her.” She left off stating the black side of the case, but she does not appear to have talked to her about the bright side. “She left speaking unto her.” The good woman was so sorrowful that she could not talk, her heartbreak was so great that she could not converse, but such silence must have been very trying to Ruth; and when a young person had just joined the people of God, it is a severe test to be brought face to face with a very mournful Christian, and not to get one encouraging word. Sometimes, brethren and sisters, we must swallow our own bitter pills as fast as ever we can, that we may not discourage others by making a wry face over them. It is sometimes the very best thing a sorrowful person can do to say, “I must not be sad; here is young So-and-so coming in. I must be cheerful now, for here comes one who might be discouraged by my grief.” You remember how the psalmist, when he was in a very mournful state of mind, said, “If I say, I will speak thus; behold, I should offend against the generation of thy children. When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me.” Let it be too painful for us to give any cause for stumbling or disquietude to those who have just come to the Saviour, but let us cheer and encourage them all we can. Still, Naomi’s silence did not discourage Ruth; she was evidently a strong-minded though gentle young woman, and she gave herself up to God and his people without any reserve. Even though she might not be helped much by the older believer, and might even be discouraged by her, and still more by the departure of her sister-in-law, Orpah, yet still she pressed on in the course she had chosen. Well, you do the same, Mary; and you, Jane, and John and Thomas. Will you be like Mr. Pliable, and go back to the City of Destruction? Or will you, like Christian, pursue your way, and steadfastly hold on through the Slough of Despond, or whatever else may be in your pathway to the Celestial City?

Now, thirdly, and very briefly, TRUE GODLINESS MUST MAINLY LIE IN THE CHOICE OF GOD. That is the very pith of the text: “Thy God shall be my God.”

First, *God is the believer’s choicest possession*; indeed, it is the distinguishing mark of a Christian that he owns a God. Naomi had not much else — no husband, no son, no lands, no gold, no silver, no pleasure even; but she had a God. Come now, my friend, are you

determined that, henceforth, and forever, the Lord shall be your chief possession? Can you say, “God shall be mine; my faith shall grasp him now, and hold him fast?”

Next, *God was, henceforth, to Ruth, as he had been to Naomi, her Ruler and Lawgiver.* When anyone truthfully says, “God shall be my God,” there is some practical meaning about that declaration; it means, “He shall influence me; he shall direct me; he shall lead me; he shall govern me; he shall be my King. I will yield to him and obey him in everything. I will endeavour to do all things according to his will. God shall be my God.” You must not want to take God to be your helper, in the sense of making him to be your servant; but to be your Master, and so to help you. Dear friends, does the Holy Spirit lead you to make this blessed choice, and to declare, “This God shall be mine, my Lawgiver and Ruler from this time forth?”

Well, then, *he must also be your Instructor.* At the present day, I am afraid that nine people out of ten do not believe in the God who is revealed to us in the Bible. “What?” you say. It is so, I grieve to say. I can point you to newspapers, to magazines, to periodicals, and also to pulpits by the score, in which there is a new god set up to be worshiped; not the God of the Old Testament, he is said to be too strict, too severe, too stern for our modern teachers. They do not believe in him. The God of Abraham is dethroned by many nowadays; and in his place they have a molluscous god, like those of whom Moses spoke, “new gods that come newly up, whom your fathers feared not.” They shudder at the very mention of the God of the Puritans. If Jonathan Edwards were to rise from the dead, they would not listen to him for a minute, they would say that they had quite a new god since his day; but brethren, I believe in the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob; this God is my God — ay, the God that drowned Pharaoh and his host at the Red Sea, and moved his people to sing “Hallelujah” as he did it; the God that caused the earth to open, and swallow up Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, and all their company — a terrible God is the God whom I adore — he is the God and Father of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, full of mercy, compassion, and grace, tender and gentle, yet just and dreadful in his holiness, and terrible out of his holy places. This is the God whom we worship, and he who comes to him in Christ, and trusts in him, will take him to be his Instructor, and so shall he learn

aright all that he needs to know. But woe unto the men of this day, we have made unto themselves a calf of their own devising, which has no power to bless or to save them! “Thy God” says Ruth to Naomi, not another god, not Chemosh or Moloch, but Jehovah “shall be my God;” and so she took him to be her Instructor, as we also must do.

Then, let us take him to be *our entire trust and stay*. O my beloved friends, the happiest thing in life is to trust God, first to trust him with your soul through Jesus Christ the Saviour, and then to trust him with everything, and in everything. I am speaking what I do know. The life of sense is death, but the life of faith is life indeed. Trust God about temporals — nay, I do not know any division between temporals and spirituals; trust God about everything, about your daily livelihood, about your health, about your wife, about your children; live a life of faith in God, and you will truly live, and all things will be right about you. It is because we get partly trusting God and partly trusting ourselves that we are often so unhappy. But when, by simple faith, you just cast yourselves on God, then you find the highest joy and bliss that is possible on earth, and a whole series of wonders is spread out before you; your life becomes like a miracle, or a succession of miracles, God hearing your prayers, and answering you out of heaven, delivering you in the time of trial, supplying your every need, and leading you ever onward by a matchless way which you know not, which every moment shall cause you greater astonishment and delight as you see the unfoldings of the character of God. Oh, that each one of you would say, “This God shall be my God; I will trust him; by his grace, I will trust him now.”

The last thing is, that THIS DECISION SHOULD LEAD US TO CAST IN OUR LOT WITH GOD’S PEOPLE AS WELL AS WITH HIMSELF, FOR RUTH SAID, “THY PEOPLE SHALL BE MY PEOPLE.”

She might have said, “You are not well spoken of, you Jews, you Israelites; the Moabites, among whom I have lived, hated you.” But in effect, she said, “I am no Moabite now. I am going to belong to Israel, and to be spoken against, too. They have all manner of bad things to say in Moab about Bethlehem-Judah; but I do not mind that, for I am going to be henceforth an inhabitant of Bethlehem, and to be reckoned in the number of the Bethlehemites, for no

longer am I of Moab and the Moabites.”

Now, will you thus cast in your lot with God’s people; and though they are spoken against, will you be willing to be spoken against, too? I daresay that the Bethlehemites were not all that Ruth could have wished them to be. Even Naomi was not; she was too sad and sorrowful; but, still, I expect that Ruth thought that her mother-in-law was a better woman than she was herself. I have heard people find fault with the members of our churches, and say that they cannot join with them, for they are such inferior sort of people. Well, I know a great many different sorts of people; and, after all, I shall be quite content to be numbered with God’s people, as I see them even in his visible Church, rather than to be numbered with any other persons in the whole world. I count the despised people of God the best company I have ever met with.

“Oh!” says one, “I will join the church when I can find a perfect one.” Then you will never join any. “Ah!” you say, “but perhaps I may.” Well, but it will not be a perfect church the moment after you have joined it, for it will cease to be perfect as soon as it receives you into its membership. I think that, if a church is such as Christ can love, it is such as I can love; and if it is such that Christ counts it as his Church, I may well be thankful to be a member of it. Christ “loved the Church, and gave himself for it;” then may I not think it an honour to be allowed to give myself to it?

Ruth was not joining a people out of whom she expected to get much. Shame on those who think to join the Church for what they can get! Yet the loaves and fishes are always a bait for some people. But there was Ruth, going with Naomi to Bethlehem, and all that the townsfolk would do, would be to turn out and stare at them, and say, “Is this Naomi? And pray who is this young woman that has come with her? This Naomi — dear me! How altered she is! How worn she looks! Quite the old woman to what she was when she left us.” Not much sympathy was given to them, as far as I gather from that remark; yet Ruth seemed to say, “I do not care how they treat me; they are God’s people, even if they have a great many faults and imperfections, and I am going to join them.” And I invite all of you who can say to us, “Your God is our God,” to join with the people of God, openly, visibly, manifestly, decidedly, without any hesitancy, even though you may gain nothing by it. Perhaps you

will not; but, on the other hand, you will bring a good deal to it, for that is the true spirit of Christ. "It is more blessed to give than to receive." Yet, in any case, cast in your lot with the people of God, and share and share alike with them.

I conclude by saying that, whatever the other Bethlehemites might be, there was among them one notable being, and it was worthwhile to join the nation for the sake of union with him. Ruth found it all out by degrees. There was a near kinsman among those people, and his name was Boaz. She went to glean in his field; and, by and by, she was married to him. Ah! that was the reason why I cast in my lot with the people of God, for I said to myself, "There is One among them who, whatever faults they may have, is so fair and lovely that he more than makes up for all their imperfections. My Lord Jesus Christ, in the midst of his people, makes them all fair in his fairness; and makes me feel that, to be poor with the poorest and most illiterate of the Church of Christ, meeting in a village barn, is an unspeakable honour, since he is among them." Our Lord Jesus Christ himself is always present wherever two or three are gathered together in his name. If his name is in the list, there may be a number of odds and ends put down with him, members of different denominations, some queer persons, some very old people; but as long as his name is in the list, I do not mind about what others are there, put my name down.

Oh, that I might have the eternal honour of having it written even at the bottom of the page beneath the name of Jesus, my Lord, the Lamb! As Boaz was there, it was enough for Ruth; and as Christ is here, that is quite enough for me. So I hope I have said sufficient to persuade you, who say that our God is your God, to come and join with us, or with some other part of Christ's Church, and so to make his people to be your people. And mind you do it at once, and in the scriptural fashion, and God bless you in the doing of it, for Christ's sake!

