

1. Both belonged to a heathen nation; both therefore were outside the covenant of God.

2. Both had come, by their marriage with the sons of E'im-elech, into a certain connection with God's people.

3. For both, this merely earthly connection came to an end; and then both had to decide, each for herself, to which people she would belong.

4. Both at first *intended* to unite themselves to Israel. Ver. 7, "They went on the way to return unto the land of Judah." Ver. 10, "They said unto her, Surely we will return with thee unto thy people."

5. Both were distressed at the idea of remaining behind in Moab. See vers. 9, 14.

But here the resemblance ends. The decisive moment came and they took different directions.

It does not seem that this is to be accounted for by one loving Naomi more than the other. True, even if we take it so, the spiritual lesson is not lost, for the case may be stated thus: Ruth's love was strong enough to make her "forget her own people, and her father's house," (Psa. 45. 10,) while Orpah's love only retained its power so long as she could have both Naomi and Moab at the same time. But it is clear that religion had something to do with the decision on either side. Not only does Ruth say, "Thy God shall be my God," but Boaz afterward speaks to her of the "Lord God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust." (Chap. 2. 12.) For that Orpah was not prepared.

Now we are all like Orpah and Ruth in their points of resemblance. (1) We are by nature "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise," Eph. 2. 12. (2) We have a certain outward connection with God's people (born in Christian land, baptized, church-goers, etc.) (3) This outward connection is not enough; each individual must decide for himself. (4) We all *intend* to be God's people. (5) The idea of *never* being saved is distressing to us all.

*And we have a like decision to make.* Will we have this world with its chances of pleasure and advancement, (see vers. 9, 11-13.) or will we be content to give up those chances, and, like Moses, choose "affliction with the people of God?" Observe that Ruth could not foresee what was in store for her. She knew she was to live

with a poor widow, and she began her new life by going out to glean a few ears of corn for their subsistence. And we know that, in the case of many of our scholars, the temporal outlook of the two opposite courses is just as strongly contrasted.

The narrative will give us an opportunity of warning against two common deceptions:—

1. Some say, It is true, I have not decided for God, and cannot just now; but, then, neither have I decided for the world: I have not gone back as Orpah did. But observe, Orpah's decision did not involve any going back at all. They were *still in Moab*; so that *not going on* was equivalent to remaining behind. Orpah might have stood still on the spot weeping and looking wistfully after the retreating figures of her sister and mother-in-law; but that would have been just as plain a decision for Moab and against God. And, unless we have already returned to God, we are still away from him. *No going away* is needed. To stay where and as we are is to decide against his service.

2. Some do weep over their condition of distance and alienation from God, and do wish they could join their happier friends who have chosen the better part; and somehow they comfort themselves in their weeping and wishing, as if that would save them. Did the young ruler's being "very sorrowful" make him a disciple? God's Word is very plain. It is not "He that weepeth over his sins," but "whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy." (Prov. 28. 13)

II. A few lines must suffice for the other line of application. Love for Naomi was the salvation of Ruth. He who belongs to the Israel of God should use the love his friends and relations have for him, saying to them "Come with us, and we will do thee good." Here is a lesson for teachers. Their scholars often love *them*: does this lead the scholars to love *their God*?

In one respect we must not imitate Naomi. She *dissuaded* her daughters-in-law from accompanying her. She meant it kindly; but she forgot the supreme blessedness of belonging to God's people, and thought only of their trials. We know both; but let our appeal to those who hesitate be, "I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." (Rom. 8. 18.)