

RUTH'S CRITICAL DECISION TO FOLLOW NAOMI AND THE LORD: A PICTURE OF TOTAL COMMITMENT THAT LEADS TO CONVERSION AND REDEMPTION RUTH 01:06–22

Introduction — Conversion

Conversion — turning away from the world of unbelievers and false worship and turning to God — is the most important decision ever made by a person. To be converted is more important than the decision about where to go to school, what profession to enter, what job to take, where to live, and even more important than whom to marry. The importance of being converted cannot be over-stressed, for it determines a person's eternal destiny. If a person is not converted, he spends eternity separated from God. If he is converted, he spends eternity with God, experiencing all the fullness of life while living on this earth. And then, when he enters heaven, he experiences all the perfection, glory, honour and reward of heaven. A person who is converted and totally committed to God knows love, joy and peace now. The person has a deep-seated sense of purpose, fulfilment and satisfaction, of assurance, meaning and significance all throughout life. Then when the converted person departs this world, he is perfected to live in the presence of God and to experience the riches of the glory of heaven itself.

The decision to be converted or not to be converted, to be committed to God or not to be committed — this is the decision to make. And it was the decision Ruth had to make. If she made the right decision — a decision for God — her life would be changed forever. She would have one of the most joyful, wonderful lives imaginable. Every need of her heart and life would be met. Ruth's critical decision is the subject of this passage of Scripture: *Ruth's Critical Decision to Follow Naomi and the LORD: a Picture of Total Commitment, the Commitment That Leads to Conversion and Redemption*, Ruth 1:6-22.

- I. The decision of Naomi to return to the promised land: the picture of a wrong motive for returning to the LORD (v. 6).
 - II. The decision of Orpah to return to Moab: a picture of choosing the world over the LORD (vv. 7-13).
 - III. The decision of Ruth to wholly commit her life to the LORD and His people: a picture of total commitment and of conversion (vv. 14-18).
 - IV. The decision of Naomi to confess her need, the terrible effects of a worldly life (vv. 19-22).
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I. *Ruth 01:06 The Decision of Naomi to Return to the Promised Land: The Picture of a Wrong Motive for Returning to the LORD*

There was the decision of Naomi to return to the promised land. Somehow she heard that the LORD had *visited, blessed* or *come to the aide* of His people back in Israel by providing food for them. Hope arose within her heart, for she had no future in Moab. She was not only a widow, but also an alien in a foreign land. Living as a widow and foreigner in a male-dominated world meant that she would be poverty-stricken all her life. Her future was dark, bleak, offering little hope and nothing to live for. Thus, when Naomi heard that the LORD had *visited* and provided for the Israelites, a spark of hope was stirred within her heart, and she made the decision to return home to the promised land.

Note exactly what Scripture says: Naomi was primarily returning because the famine was now over. There was again food in Israel. Her basic interest was still food, the very thing that had driven her and her family to leave the promised land and to live among the unbelievers and false worshippers of Moab. Her decision to move back to the promised land was the right decision. But note this fact: there is no mention of Naomi confessing her sins. Nothing is said about her repenting and seeking forgiveness from God. Nor is there any mention of her returning to the promised land for the purpose of seeking fellowship with God. As Warren Wiersbe points out, her decision was right, but her motive was wrong. She was still focused on food, not fellowship with the LORD! Naomi was actually returning home a *defeated* believer, a widow gripped by despair and a deep sense that she was forsaken by God (vv. 20-21). (Warren W. Wiersbe. *Be Committed*, p. 18).

RUTH 01: 06 VISITED, LOOKING AFTER, TAKING CARE OF

*When Naomi heard in Moab that the LORD had come to the aid of his people by providing food for them, she and her daughters-in-law prepared to return home from there. **Ruth 01: 06***

The word *visited, blessed* or *come to the aide* of (paqad) means to oversee, look upon, inspect with either friendly or hostile intent. (James Strong. *New Strongs Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1990). The word means far more than to visit a person for a brief period of time. It has the idea of actually inspecting, looking upon, examining for the purpose of rewarding or reprimanding. Robert L. Hubbard, Jr. says this:

The verb paqad plays an important role in other Old Testament events. By using it here, the writer reminded readers of other “visits” by God.

=> God “looked after” barren Sarah and Hamah, and they conceived and gave birth (Gen 21:1; 1 Sam 2:21).

=> [God] 'looked after ' Israel and Egypt — that is, He freed her from slavery as promised (Gen 50:24-25; Exo 3:16; 4:31).

=> Later, God promises to "look after " Israel by bringing her back from exile and providing her good leadership (Jer 29:10; Zep 2:7; Zec 3:10).

Thus, *paqad* recalled two significant things. First, it stressed that God still cared for His people. Second, it implied that He might yet turn this story's tragedy into triumph. In some, it said that God was still committed to doing good things for His people. (Robert L. Hubbard, Jr. *Ordinary Faithful People*, pp. 33-34).

Thought 1. The one thing Naomi needed above all else was to repent. She needed to repent of her distrust and unbelief. It was her and her husband's failure to trust God that had caused them to forsake the promised land, moving to Moab among the unbelievers and false worshippers of this world. Instead of trusting God, they had turned to the world for help and for food in the famine crisis. Once again, Naomi needed to confess her sin of unbelief and distrust; she needed to repent of her apostasy. Likewise, when we sin, we must confess our sin and repent.

Mat 5:4 "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted."

Acts 8:22 Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps he will forgive you for having such a thought in your heart.

2 Chr 7:14 If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

Psa 34:18 The LORD is close to the broken-hearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.

Isa 55:7 Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon. □

II. ***Ruth 01:07–13 The Decision of Orpah to Return to Moab: A Picture of Choosing the World Over the LORD***

There was the decision of Orpah to return to Moab. This is a clear picture of choosing the world and false gods over the LORD.

1. Note Naomi's spiritual insensitivity, the dullness of her spirit (vv. 7-10). Taking Orpah and Ruth with her, she set out to return to the promised land. The fact that Orpah and Ruth were accompanying her meant a most wonderful thing: they would soon be exposed to the message of the LORD, that He is the only living and true God. They would have the opportunity to be saved, to become believers and be identified with the people of God.

For this reason, Naomi should have been encouraging Orpah and Ruth to accompany her. But she soon began to discourage them. She pressed them to return home to their families. Her suggestion reveals a spiritual insensitivity, a spirit of dullness. She was using her influence to turn them away from God, not to God. She was suggesting that they return to the world of unbelievers and false worship. Why? Why did Naomi encourage her two daughters-in-law to return home? So they could remarry; so they could find comfort and security in the home of another husband. But their devotion to Naomi ran ever so deep. As she kissed them good-bye, they began to feel the pain of separation, weeping and declaring a deep sense of obligation to her. They professed they would stay with Naomi, going with her to her people (vv. 9-10).

2. Now note Naomi's carnal, fleshly insistence that her two daughters-in-law return to their families (vv. 11-13). Three different times Naomi insisted that they return to Moab, the world of unbelievers and false worship (vv. 8, 11, 12). She even assured them of her prayers, that she would be praying for the LORD to show kindness to them even as they had shown kindness to her and her family (v. 8). Then she used two arguments to support her case, doing all she could to convince Orpah and Ruth to return home:

=> First, she could not bear any more sons who could become their husbands (vv. 11-13). She was simply too old. Even if she did remarry and bear sons, Orpah and Ruth could not wait until the sons were old enough to marry.

=> Second, they should no longer suffer her bitter trials of sorrow and poverty, for they were severe. The very hand of God's chastisement had fallen upon her (v. 13). Note that she attributed the bitter trials to God's hand of chastisement; she acknowledged that God was disciplining her.

The point is this: if Naomi had been living for the LORD, she would have been encouraging her daughters-in-law to give their lives to God and to continue the journey to the promised land. She would never have encouraged — certainly never insisted — that they return to their homes in Moab, that they return to the world of unbelievers and false worshippers. But tragically, Naomi was living a carnal, fleshly, disobedient life. Consequently, she did exactly what she should never have done: urged them to turn around, not to go with her to the promised land.

3. Unfortunately, Naomi's insistence penetrated the mind and heart of Orpah. Orpah made the decision to return to Moab, to the world of heathen and idol worshippers. She had started out on the journey to the promised land with a broken heart and a deep sense of obligation. She had committed herself to continue the journey with Naomi, the journey that would have led her to the people of God, to the message of salvation in the living and true God. She was "not far from the kingdom of God" (Mark 12:34). But Orpah, this widow, made the wrong decision, the decision to return to the world of unbelievers and false worshippers (v. 14).

Thought 1. We must never make the decision made by Orpah, the decision...

- to turn away from God
- to turn away from pursuing the promised land
- to turn back to the world of unbelievers and false worshippers

Ruth 1:15 *"Look," said Naomi, "your sister-in-law is going back to her people and her gods. Go back with her."*

Mat 16:26 *"What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?"*

Luke 21:34 *"Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap."*

Acts 2:40 *With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation."*

2 Cor 5:11 *Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade others. What we are is plain to God, and I hope it is also plain to your conscience.*

2 Cor 6:14-16 *Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? Or what does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people."*

2 Cor 6:17-18 *"Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters," says the Lord Almighty.*

Col 3:2 *Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.*

2 Th 3:6 *In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers, to keep away from every brother who is idle and does not live according to the teaching you received from us.*

Titus 2:12-13 *It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope — the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ.*

James 4:4 *You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.*

1 John 2:15-16 *Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world — the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does — comes not from the Father but from the world.*

Exo 34:12 Be careful not to make a treaty with those who live in the land where you are going, or they will be a snare among you.

Deut 30:19 This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live.

Psa 1:1 Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers.

Prov 4:14 Do not set foot on the path of the wicked or walk in the way of evil men.

III. *Ruth 01:14–18 The Decision of Ruth to Wholly Commit her Life to the LORD and His People: A Picture of Total Commitment and of Conversion*

There was the decision by Ruth to wholeheartedly commit her life to the LORD and His people. Ruth's decision is one of the most memorable, powerful confessions in all of Scripture. In contrast to Orpah, Ruth made a magnificent confession of total commitment, a commitment that was to lead to her conversion and redemption.

1. Ruth demonstrated a deep, undying sense of devotion. She loved Naomi and clung to her (v. 15). In contrast to Orpah, she did not give up, but bluntly rejected Naomi's pleas for her to return to Moab. But Naomi continued to insist that Ruth return to her people and her gods, just as Orpah had done (v. 15). However, Ruth refused to listen to her mother-in-law. Forcefully, Ruth insisted that Naomi back off, stop urging her to leave and turn back. And then Ruth made her memorable declaration — a stunning, profound commitment (vv. 16-17).

Was Ruth actually converted at this point, or was she converted earlier in Moab due to the belief of Naomi and her family? Or was she to be converted later, after arriving in the promised land? Scripture does not specifically say, but she had come to trust in the LORD and to take "refuge under His wings" by the time she met Boaz (2:12). Whatever the case, the startling and total commitment now declared by Ruth is a clear picture of conversion. She made three strong pledges:

2. First, she made a strong commitment to family (v. 15). Technically, Ruth was now a part of Naomi's family, under her guardianship. Consequently, Ruth should have obeyed Naomi's urging to leave and return to Moab. But Ruth loved Naomi and was totally devoted to her. Thus, she insisted that Naomi stop urging her to return to her people. In a straightforward manner, she declared that she would not leave. But rather, she would go wherever Naomi went and stay wherever Naomi stayed (v. 16). Her devotion compelled her to remain by Naomi's side, never leaving her.
3. Second, she made a strong commitment to God and to God's people (v. 16). Unequivocally, she declares, "Your people will be my people and your God my God." By this statement, Ruth was renouncing her Moabite roots, the world of unbelievers

and false worshippers. This included both her family and her citizenship in Moab. She was now putting her faith in the only living and true God, the LORD Himself. And she was determined to become identified with the people of God, the Israelites. What a strong, striking commitment — a willingness to forsake her own family in order to know the true and living God!

4. Third, Ruth declared that her commitment was until death; it was total, final and unshakable. To this she swore or took an oath: where Naomi died, she would die, and there she would be buried (v. 17). She would stay with Naomi and serve the living and true God until death. With this declaration, Naomi realized that Ruth's commitment was unshakable, set as though in concrete. Consequently, she accepted Ruth's decision (v. 18).

Thought 1. Ruth's total commitment is a strong example for us. She was not indecisive or neutral; neither can we be. Our commitment can be no different than hers. Just as she made a total commitment to God and His people, so we must make a total commitment to Jesus Christ, to follow Him and to become identified with the people of God, the church.

(1) We must be totally, wholeheartedly committed to Jesus Christ.

Mat 6:24 *"No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other; or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money."*

Mat 10:37 *"Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me."*

Luke 9:23 *And he said to them all, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me."*

Luke 14:26-27 *"If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters — yes, even his own life — he cannot be my disciple. And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple."*

Rom 8:13 *For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.*

Rom 12:1-2 *Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God — this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is — his good, pleasing and perfect will.*

Phil 3:7-8 *But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ.*

Deut 10:12 *And now, O Israel, what does the LORD your God ask of you but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.*

Prov 23:26 *My son, give me your heart and let your eyes keep to my ways.*

- (2) We must make a strong commitment to identify with God's people, the church. We must never forsake God's people, but rather love and fellowship with them, humbly serving and ministering to them.

Mat 20:28 *"Just as the Son of man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."*

John 13:14 *"Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet."*

John 21:16 *Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep."*

Gal 6:2 *Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ.*

Gal 6:10 *Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.*

Heb 10:23-25 *Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another — and all the more as you see the Day approaching.*

James 4:17 *Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins.*

Psa 34:14 *Turn from evil and do good; seek peace, and pursue it.*

IV. Ruth 01:19–22 The Decision of Naomi to Confess her Need, the Terrible Effects of a Worldly Life

There was the decision of Naomi to confess her need and the terrible effects of a worldly life. Note how Naomi acknowledged God's chastisement, that His hand of chastisement had fallen upon her.

When Naomi and Ruth arrived in Bethlehem, news of Naomi's return soon spread throughout the whole town. For over ten years, Naomi had been away, so the people were very surprised to see her. And when they got their first glimpse of her, they were utterly shocked at her appearance. She obviously looked so bad, the women exclaimed, "Can this really be Naomi?" The question expresses both surprise and bewilderment, wondering how she could look so pathetic — so much older and grayer, so wrinkled, stooped and much slower moving. (Robert L. Hubbard, Jr. *Ordinary Faithful People*, p. 59).

In answering their surprise, Naomi made a striking and revealing confession: she had suffered the hand of God's chastisement, suffered His discipline, His correction (v. 20)! The meaning of Naomi's name is *pleasant*, but in response to their surprise, Naomi

suggested they call her *Mara*, because the Almighty had made her life very *bitter*. God had chastised her. Note exactly what she confessed:

- => that God had made her life very bitter (*Mara*) (v. 20).
- => that she had gone away full, with great excitement and hope, but the LORD had made her life empty and she had lost everything.
- => that the LORD had afflicted her with trial after trial and suffering after suffering.
- => that the LORD had brought a life of tragedy upon her, for she had lost her husband and her two sons.

Naomi was confessing that her life was *bitter*, not *pleasant*. Note that she called God “the Almighty” (El Shaddai) two different times (vv. 20-21). *El Shaddai* means *the All-powerful ONE*. Naomi acknowledged that God possesses all power, that He is sovereign and rules over all. The bitterness, emptiness, affliction and tragedy of her life were all due to El Shaddai, the *All-powerful ONE*.

Note the date when Ruth and Naomi arrived in Bethlehem. It was at the very beginning of harvest season. This is an important fact to know in preparation for the next chapter of study.

Thought 1. God chastises His people. If we sin and do evil, God will discipline us. He will do all He can to correct us in order to keep us from harming ourselves and others. God wants to keep us from damaging or destroying human life and the environment. Therefore, God will do all He can to protect us and to make us secure. This is the reason God disciplines, corrects and chastises us.

John 15:2 “He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.”

1 Cor 11:30-32 *That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep. But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment. Nevertheless, when we are judged in this way by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be finally condemned with the world.*

Heb 12:5-6 *And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: “My son, do not make light of the Lord’s discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son.”*

Rev 3:19 *Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent.*

Deut 8:5 *Know then in your heart that as a man disciplines his son, so the LORD your God disciplines you.*

Psa 94:12 *Blessed is the man you discipline, O LORD, the man you teach from your law.*

Prov 3:11-12 *My son, do not despise the LORD’s discipline and do not resent his rebuke, because the LORD disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in. ■*