

Sabbath School.

BIBLE LESSONS.

BY REV. J. H. VINCENT, D. D.

Third Quarter.

Lesson 11.—Sept. 9. Ruth 1: 14-23.

RUTH AND NAOMI.

GOLDEN TEXT.

The people shall be my people, and thy God my God.—Ruth 1: 16.

14. They lifted up their voices—Naomi and her two daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth. Orpah kissed the kiss at meeting and parting is the customary friendly and respectful salutation in the east. Ruth clave—expressing her salutation in action Orpah had expressed hers.

15. Come back unto her people—The Moabites, descendants of Lot, living east of the Jordan and the Dead Sea. Unto her gods—In after times, the leading divinity of the Moabites was Chemosh, to whom the famous description of the "Moabite stone" is ascribed. Return thou after—Naomi dissuades in order that Ruth might freely, under no pressure but that of her own love, accept Israel's God and people. Only after this is she, and she holds firmly to her decision, does Naomi consent and cease to dissuade her.

16. Entreat me not—Naomi and her house have made Israel also appear lovely in the eyes of Ruth. Neither thou goest—Though to a country I never saw, and which I have been trained up in a low and ill repute of; though far from my own country, yet with thee every road will be pleasant. Thy people shall be my people—When we take God for our God we must take his people for our people in all conditions; though they be a poor, despised people, yet they be his, they must be ours.

17. There will I be buried—Not wishing to have so much as her dead body carried back to the country of her birth in token of any remaining affection for it; but Naomi and she being joined souls, she desires they mingle dust, in hopes of rising together, and being together forever in the other world. The Lord do so—This is a form of imprecation present in the books of Samuel and Kings, by which the person swearing laid down upon himself a severe punishment in case he should not do his word or carry out his resolution. It may have been accompanied by some earnest gesture which expressed its meaning.

18. She was steadfastly minded—The effect of Naomi's repeated entreaties to Ruth to leave her was only to bring out more clearly Ruth's steadfast determination to cast in her lot with the people of the Lord. She was speaking—See the power of resolution, how it puts temptation to flight. Those that are unresolved, who go in religious ways without a steadfast mind, tempt the tempter, stand like a door half open, which invites a thief; but resolution bolts and bolts the door, resists the tempter, and forces him to flee.

19. Until they came to Bethlehem—Bethlehem was a small village, six miles south of Jerusalem, afterward the birthplace of David, and of his son, Jesus. It is still in existence, a prosperous place of three thousand inhabitants, more neat and more beautiful than the average Palestinian village. All the city was moved—The movement that the town was moved introduced for its bearing on the narrative. See chap. 2: 11, 12. She said—The woman of the city with whom she had been forming intimate were surprised to see her in this condition; she was so much changed and altered with her affliction that they could scarcely believe their own eyes, or think that this was the same person whom they had formerly seen, so fresh and fair and

20. Naomi . . . Mara—The meaning of Naomi is "pleasant, sweet," to which she opposes what she calls a "bitter." Exod. 15: 23. Almighty hath dealt—The name given to her is almost peculiar to the Old Testament, and to the Book of Job,

in which last it is found thirty times. It occurs twice in the Psalms, and four times in the Prophets.

21. I went out . . . the Lord hath brought me home—She says, "I went away, and Jehovah has brought me home again." I went because it was my will to go, not God's; now God's judgment has sent me back. Full of joy in her sons, and of hope of a cheerful old age, surrounded by children and children's children; but empty now of all these, without possessions and without hope. A penitential feeling pervades her lamentation. The Lord hath testified—Naomi, in the bitterness of her spirit, complains that the Lord himself was turned against her, and was bringing her sins up for judgment.

22. So Naomi returned—The curiosity of the inhabitants of Bethlehem is satisfied; they have heard the history of Ruth; but with this their sympathy has likewise come to an end. Ruth the Moabitess—This was the description by which Ruth was commonly designated by the people of Bethlehem, as appears from chap. 2: 6, where the identical phrase, "The Moabitess who returned with Naomi from the country (field) of Moab" recurs. In the beginning of barley harvest—This is mentioned to explain the narrative in the next chapter. The glimpses of ancient life in the future town of David and of Christ are full of interest. Then, as now, its single street ran along the double crest of the white chalk ridge 2,500 feet above the sea; its slopes terraced into hanging gardens, with rows of olives and vines; a pleasant valley lying underneath on three sides, musical with the sound of brooks, though its eastern end is almost touched by the terrible wilderness of Judah. This sunny breadth, when Ruth's story opens, is yellow with ripe barley, and rich with tall green wheat that will be golden ere long. The harvest is reaped by men, but the sheaves are bound by maidens. Life is still simple, and the well-to-do Boaz courteously greets his workpeople as he comes to them, and is as politely greeted in return.

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