

# **Hanging by a Thread**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Naomi, the mother-in-law of Ruth, is our present focus. As her experiences well illustrate, hope often seems to hang by a mere thread. Yet, despite misfortune and tragedy, heartache and grief, the story of Ruth and Naomi ends in happiness.

## **COMPOUNDED CALAMITY**

During the time of the Judges, famine struck the city of Bethlehem in the land of Judah. Elimelech, a citizen of that place, took his wife, Naomi, and their two sons, Mahlon and Chilion, journeyed eastward across the Jordan, and sojourned in the land of Moab.

Yet, troubles only increased. Elimelech died, and Naomi was left a widow. Eventually, her sons, who had married two Moabite women, Orpah and Ruth, also died. Naomi was bereft of her husband and her children. Deciding to return to Judah, Naomi expresses gratefulness to her daughters-in-law, and prays that the Lord will grant them rest (Ruth 1:6-9).

Orpah and Ruth manifest a willingness to accompany Naomi, but she insists that they remain behind, urging them to remarry, saying, “No, my daughters; for it is harder for me than for you, for the hand of the Lord has gone forth against me” (Ruth 1:10-13). Orpah consents, but Ruth determines to accompany her mother-in-law, and pledges her allegiance to Naomi (Ruth 1:14-18).

## **EMBITTERED COMPLAINT**

Returning to the land of Judah and the city of Bethlehem, Naomi asks that she no longer be called Naomi, meaning “my joy” or “my delight,” but rather Mara, signifying one who is “bitter” (Ruth 1:19-21).

## **SHREWD COUNSEL**

Arriving home at the beginning of the barley harvest (Ruth 1:22), Ruth asks permission to glean grain in the fields. Naomi, says, “Go, my daughter” (Ruth 2:1-2). Ruth labors diligently in the

fields, making a good impression upon a landowner whose name is Boaz; afterwards, Naomi advises Ruth to go out with the maidens of Boaz, and labor only in his fields (Ruth 2:17-23).

When it becomes obvious to both women that Boaz has taken more than a passing interest in Ruth, Naomi instructs her to communicate privately with him (Ruth 3:1-5). Afterwards, Naomi's advice was "watch and wait" (Ruth 3:18).

## **RESTORED JOY**

Through skillful negotiation with the nearest relative before the elders of the city, Boaz gains the right to the lands of Elimelech and the hand of Ruth (Ruth 4:13). As romance blossoms into marriage, the women of Bethlehem celebrate Naomi's renewed good fortune, and praise Ruth for her steadfast loyalty (Ruth 4:14-15).

## **RENEWED HOPE**

Holding her grandson in her lap, Naomi once again comes to know joy and delight (Ruth 4:16-17). As the hand of God providentially converts tragedy into triumph, hope prevails.

## **CONCLUSION**

Acknowledging the value of Christian hope, may we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm to the end (Heb. 3:5-6), having our hope securely anchored to the redemptive work of Jesus Christ (Heb. 6:19-20), encouraging one another to hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, remaining ever faithful as the final day of reckoning draws near (Heb. 10:23-25).