

Ruth 1:12

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Turn again, my daughters, go your way; for I am too old to have an husband. If I should say, I have hope, if I should have an husband also to night, and should also bear sons;

Analysis

Turn again, my daughters, go your way; for I am too old to have an husband. If I should say, I have hope, if I should have an husband also to night, and should also bear sons; Naomi intensifies her argument with brutal realism. The repetition "Turn again" (shovnah, שׁוֹבֵנָה) plus "go your way" (lekhnah, לְקַנָּה) creates emphatic dismissal—she's urging them away. "I am too old to have an husband" (zakanti mihyot le'ish, זָקַנְתִּי מִיחִיּוֹת לְאִישׁ) states biological reality: she has aged past (zakanti) the possibility of marriage and childbearing.

The hypothetical construction "If I should say, I have hope" (ki amarta yesh-li tikvah, כי אָמַרְתִּי יְשַׁלֵּי תִּקְוָה) introduces an impossible scenario. "Hope" (tikvah, תִּקְוָה) means expectation or prospect—the same word used for the scarlet cord Rahab hung from her window (Joshua 2:18, 21), symbolizing hope of deliverance. Naomi protests she has no such hope, no thread of expectation to cling to. Even if the absurd occurred—remarriage "tonight" (halaylah, הַלְלָה, emphasizing immediacy) and bearing sons—this wouldn't help her daughters-in-law.

The verse's piling of hypotheticals (if... if... and also...) creates rhetorical force: even granting every impossible condition, the logic still fails. Naomi's argument moves from biological impossibility (too old) through hypothetical absurdity (remarriage tonight, immediate conception, bearing sons) toward the crushing conclusion in verse 13: even if all this happened, the daughters-in-law couldn't reasonably wait. Her reasoning is irrefutable by human calculation—yet God's

redemption operates beyond human calculation, accomplishing what seems impossible.

Historical Context

Ancient Near Eastern society provided few options for elderly widows. Without social security, retirement savings, or institutional care for the aged, widows depended on adult sons for survival. Multiple Old Testament texts address care for widows (Exodus 22:22; Deuteronomy 10:18; 14:29; 24:17-21; 27:19; Isaiah 1:17; James 1:27), indicating both God's concern and society's frequent neglect. Prophets condemned exploitation of widows (Isaiah 10:1-2; Ezekiel 22:7; Malachi 3:5), while wisdom literature celebrated those who helped them (Job 29:13; 31:16-22; Proverbs 15:25).

Naomi's self-assessment as "too old" for remarriage and childbearing reflects realistic understanding of her situation. Unlike Sarah, who bore Isaac at ninety (a miraculous, exceptional event—Genesis 17:17; 18:11-14), Naomi expects no divine intervention. Her bitterness in verses 13 and 20-21 suggests she believes God has abandoned her, making miraculous provision unimaginable. This contrasts with Abraham and Sarah's eventual faith (Hebrews 11:11-12) and foreshadows the book's theme: God provides redemption through unexpected, ordinary means (Ruth and Boaz) that reveal extraordinary providence.

The emphasis on remarriage "tonight" and immediately bearing sons highlights the absurdity. Even if possible, pregnancy takes nine months, childhood many years. Verse 13 makes explicit what verse 12 implies: waiting would be unreasonable. Naomi's airtight logic demonstrates that human wisdom, when separated from trust in God's providence, leads to hopelessness. The book of Ruth systematically dismantles this hopelessness by showing how God weaves redemption through circumstances that seemed to offer no hope.

Related Passages

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. What situations has God used to strip away your 'hopeful' human plans so He could reveal His better plans?
2. How does focusing solely on visible resources and human possibilities limit your faith in God's redemptive creativity?
3. Are you willing to obey God even when obedience appears to lead away from the only rational path to security?

Interlinear Text

שׁ בָּנָה	בְּנָתִי	לְכָה	כִּי	מַהְיִם זֶה	זֶה נָתָתִי	לְכָה נָתָתִי	מַהְיִם זֶה
Turn again	my daughters	H1980	H3588	your way	for I am too old	H2204	H1961
H7725	H1323						
לֹא יְשַׁ	אָמַרְתִּי	כִּי	יְשַׁ	תְּקַנֵּה	לְ	תְּקַנֵּה	לְ
if I should have an husband	H3588	If I should say	H559	I have	H0	hope	H1571
H376				H3426		H8615	
כִּי יְהִי	כָּל יְלָה	לֹא יְשַׁ	כִּי	זֶה	זֶה	לְלֹדֶתֶת	
H1961	also to night	if I should have an husband	H376	H1571		and should also bear	H3205
	H3915						
בָּנִים							
sons							
H1121							

Additional Cross-References

Genesis 17:17 (Parallel theme): Then Abraham fell upon his face, and laughed, and said in his heart, Shall a child be born unto him that is an hundred years old? and shall Sarah, that is ninety years old, bear?