

THE RICHNESS OF חֶסֶד (Hesed) IN JONAH AND RUTH

Yamoah, James, PhD.

Boateng, Samuel Stevens, PhD.

John, Avorgah

Ghana Christian University College, Accra, Ghana

jimmyamoah@yahoo.com

dr.ssboateng@vnu.edu.gh

Abstract

One of the words of the Hebrew Bible the meaning of which embraces many virtues is חֶסֶד, usually transliterated as *hesed*. It has many meanings, such as loyalty, faithfulness, kindness, favor, grace, mercy, and other related meanings. Particularly in the biblical books of Jonah and Ruth, its rich meaning and applications are appreciable. This article will consider its root meaning, forms, and occurrences in Scripture. It will not only advance some of the translations of this word in order to reveal its deeper meaning but also discuss its wider application to life in general. Specifically, the discussion will show how some people benefited from the value of this word through various encounters and life experiences. It will be realized that what the word stands for and how people experience it differ in various situations. Upon a careful exploration, it is realized that an engagement with this virtue brings people into a situation where God's purpose is achieved and His name glorified.

KEY WORDS: Kindness, love, grace, mercy, faithfulness, loving kindness, and loyalty.

Introduction

If there are Hebrew words whose meanings embrace many virtues, one of them will be חֶסֶד, The word is hereby transliterated as "*hesed*." Its rich meanings and applications are vast, especially in the Old Testament. Particularly in the books of Jonah and Ruth, it runs both at the foreground and is also expressed outwardly in appreciable ways. What the word really stands for and how people experience it differ from person to person and in different situations.

This presentation will consider some of the translations of חֶסֶד, (*hesed*) in order to reveal its deeper and richer meaning to life in general. Specifically, the discussion will show how some people benefited from the value of this word through various encounters and life experiences. Some of such people consciously or otherwise acknowledged and openly appreciated the value of the word. But generally, one will learn that an engagement with *hesed*, more often than not,

brings people into a situation where God's purpose is achieved and His name glorified in a person's life.

The root meaning of “חֶסֶד (Hesed)”

The noun, חֶסֶד, (hesed), comes from the Hebrew root חסד. As will be discussed later, it denotes acts such as; kindness, love, grace, mercy, faithfulness, loyalty, and so on. It is one of the most important words in the Old Testament. חֶסֶד is usually revealed where there is a relationship between some entities. Accordingly, Zodhiates commented on the virtue thus: “It is central to God's character (Ps 59:10; 100:5), and it is closely tied to His covenant with man (Deut. 7:9, 12).

In fact, such a covenant may be thought of as the relationship from which this virtue flows.” He continues that the demonstration of this attribute by the Almighty, however, ‘is not bound by the covenant itself, and though men may prove unfaithful to His relationship, God's character is everlasting (Ps 107:1; 118:1-4, 29; Isa. 54:8).’ And even where there is no concrete relationship, ‘the person exercising this virtue has the choice to treat the recipient as if such a relationship exists.’ Zodhiates indicated that if the act of “חֶסֶד (hesed)” is towards God, an act of praise or thanksgiving is what is usually given Him. But if the benefactor is humanity or from one human being to another it more often goes with some acts of appreciation. Therefore, it should be understood that such acts are often reciprocated, and that, it is not unusual for the benefactor to request a return from the recipient’ (1996:1516).

Forms and meanings of “חֶסֶד (Hesed)”

The Hebrew word for חֶסֶד (hesed) is difficult to translate uniformly by a single English word. Gaebelein (1992:521) observed that it is usually associated with loyalty to covenant obligations and has been translated “keep faith” (NEB) and “be good” (TEV), and that *hesed* encompasses deeds of mercy performed by a more powerful party for the benefit of the weaker one. It is important also to note a further observation by Gaebelein that in KJV, the word is translated by “mercy,” “kindness,” “loving kindness” and also by eight other words of similar meaning. Though in many cases the rendering expresses its meaning closely enough, none of these is adequate (1985:386).

Holladay (1988:111) offers the following forms of “חֶסֶד (hesed): vb. חָסַד, sf. חִסְדִּי, חִסְדֵּךְ; pl. חִסְדֵּי, cs. חִסְדֵּי, sf. חִסְדֵּי, חִסְדֵּי (Ps 106:45, and Lam. 3:22, Kt חִסְדֵּי); Ps 119:41, חִסְדֵּךְ. He also provided the following translations of the word:

1. Obligation to the community; in relation to relatives, friends, guests, master and servants, etc; also it might be translated as unity, solidarity;
2. Loyalty; as initiated by ceremony, or results from closer relation between parties, but the obligations are largely the same lasting loyalty (Gen. 24:27);
3. Faithfulness; a show of it (Gen. 21:23); for example, as the one that exists between son and a dying father (Gen. 47:29); wife and husband (Gen. 20:13); relatives (Ruth 2:20); guests (Gen. 19:19); friends (1 Sam. 20:8); people who do favors for each other (Judges 1:24); king and people (2 Sam. 3:8); confidants (Prov. 11:17); devout men (Isa. 57:1); loyal kings (1 Kings 20:31);

4. It is translated as favor (Esther 2:9);
5. In relation to God with people or individuals, it is translated as either faithfulness or kindness (Ps. 33:5; Jer. 33:11; Exod. 34:6), or as evidences of grace (Isa. 55:3).

One easily realizes how all the above translations reflect a virtuous character of the word, whether it flows from God to man, or is something that men express among themselves. Gaebelein (1985:386) noted:

It is a covenant word that expresses the behavior expected from those linked together in a covenant relationship. In a purely human relationship, “loyalty” is probably always adequate (cf. 2 Sam 3: 8). When *hesed* is applied to God, it does mean “mercy” and “love”; but it is always loyal love and covenanted mercy. There is much to be said for RSV’s “steadfast love” but it is too wooden when used regularly. NEB was probably wise in reverting to a range of renderings, including “constant love.”

The kind of loyalty (*hesed*) demanded by the type of covenant like that made at Sinai was a mutual obligation to God as the initiator and the Israelites to whom the covenant was given (Exod. 20:6). In that case, ‘one who broke the covenant’s first commandment by having other gods had “abandoned” (*azab*) his or her loyalty to Yahweh’ (Stuart 1985:478). The application of the term stretches beyond the strict covenant stipulations to make room for extreme situations. This is reflected in the fact that there were cases of experiences of *hesed* outside of the covenant. This is reflected in Britt’s comment that “while *hesed* is a formulaic term in covenant tradition, some poetic texts, notably Ps. 89, Isa. 54, and Lam. 3, place the term in striking contrast to its immediate context. Narrative cases of unexpected *hesed* include the attachments between Ruth and Naomi, David and Jonathan, Abraham and Sarah (in the wife-sister scenes), Yahweh and Israel, and three episodes about spies.” This is also to mean that “...When *hesed* appears unexpectedly in poetic and narrative texts, it often denotes unexpected attachments” (2003:289-90).

The richness of the term appears to be only in the light of positive qualities. On the contrary, it should be pointed out that *hesed* can be translated in the negative sense. Holladay (p. 111) mentioned some of such meanings as disgrace (NIV), or a shameful thing (NAB, RSV, and NLT), Lev. 20:17; cf. Prov. 14:34, while the KJV translates the noun in the above scriptures as wicked.

Occurrence

Due to the vast translation of *hesed*, many sources provide varying numbers of its occurrence in the Hebrew Bible. According to Gaebelein (1985:386), the word probably translated generally as “love”) is found 247 times in the OT, mainly in contexts involving God. The breakdown of the translation according to another source appears as follows in the Holy scriptures: deeds of devotion (2), devotion (m) (1), devout (1), faithfulness (1), favor (2), good (1), kindly (m) (7), kindness (32), kindnesses (1), loveliness (1), loving-kindness (176), loving-

kindnesses (7), loyal deeds (1), loyalty (6), mercies (1), merciful (2), mercy (1), righteousness (m) (1), unchanging love (m) (2) (BibleWorks.com 2006).

Presentation of “חֶסֶד (Hesed),” in the selected books

Though the detail discussion of חֶסֶד here is based on two books, it specifically focuses on selected texts: Jonah 2:9; cf. 4:2; and Ruth 2:20; cf. 3:10. It should be noted that the treatment of the issues is Jonah before Ruth is by a special design and not according to any chronology. It should again be realized without surprise that the many different Bible versions give different translations to the word and its derivatives. Even with a particular version, the word might be translated differently depending upon the context of the usage. These are some of the important areas that cannot be glossed over in any discussions on major issues in these books. Consequently, a little attention will be devoted to few of these interesting and yet controversial issues. The objective is to unearth the vast application of חֶסֶד.

In the book of Jonah

The New International Version (NIV)¹ translates the noun derivative חֶסֶדִּים (noun with 3mp pron. suff.) in Jonah 2:8 (it is 2:9 in the Hebrew text) as “grace,” and the original form חֶסֶד (adj. masc. sing. independent const.) in 4:2 as “love.” That is:

מִשְׁמָרִים הַבְּלִי-שׁוֹא חֶסֶדִּים יַעֲזֹבוּ: WTT² Jonah 2:9

^{NIV} Jonah 2:8: Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs.

וַיִּתְפַּלֵּל אֶל־יְהוָה וַיֹּאמֶר אָנָּה יְהוָה הֲלוֹא־אֲנִי WTT Jonah 4:2

רַבְרִי עַד־הַיּוֹתִי עַל־אַדְמָתִי עַל־כֵּן קָדַמְתִּי לְבָרַח תַּרְשִׁישָׁה

כִּי יָדַעְתִּי כִּי אַתָּה אֱלֹהִים רַחוּם וְרַחוּן אַרְךָ אֲפִים וְרַב־חֶסֶד

וְנָחָם עַל־הָרָעָה:

^{NIV} Jonah 4:2: He prayed to the LORD, “O LORD, is this not what I said when I was still at home? That is why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity.”

¹Note: The various translations used in this presentation are; NIV-New International Version; KJV-King James Version; NAB-New American Bible; NAS-New American Standard Bible; RSV-Revised Standard Version; TEV-Today's English Version; and NLT-New Living Translation.

²WTT - BHS Hebrew Old Testament 4th edition [obtained from BibleWorks.com – [c:\program file\bibleworks 7\init\bw700.swc] 2006.

A critical consideration of the appearance of the noun in these texts indicates that within the same book of scripture, a noun in different derivation is translated differently by the same version.

In the book of Ruth

Twice in the book of Ruth the word appears as חֶסֶדוֹ (noun with 3ms pron. suff.) in 2:20 and חֶסֶדָּךְ (noun with 2fs pron. suff.) 3:10, and the NIV translates both words as “kindness.”

וְהָאֹמֶר נַעֲמִי לְכַלְתָּהּ בְּרוּךְ הוּא לַיהוָה אֲשֶׁר לֹא־עָזַב
חֶסֶדּוֹ אֶת־הַחַיִּים וְאֶת־הַמֵּתִים וְהָאֹמֶר לָהּ נַעֲמִי קָרֹב לָנוּ הָאִישׁ
מִנָּאֲלָנוּ הוּא:

^{NIV} Ruth 2:20: “The LORD bless him!” Naomi said to her daughter-in-law. “He has not stopped showing his kindness to the living and the dead.” She added, “That man is our close relative; he is one of our kinsman-redeemers.”
In Ruth, other translations like KJV, NLT, and RSV also use “kindness,” but NAB translates it as “merciful.”

וַיֹּאמֶר בְּרוּכָה אַתְּ לַיהוָה בְּתִי הַיְטַבְתְּ חֶסֶדְךָ הָאֲחֵרוֹן
מִן־הָרֵאשֹׁן לְבִלְתִּי־לָכֶת אַחֲרֵי הַבְּחוּרִים אִם־דָּל וְאִם־עָשִׁיר:

^{NIV} Ruth 3:10: The LORD bless you, my daughter,” he replied. “This kindness is greater than that which you showed earlier: You have not run after the younger men, whether rich or poor.
In Ruth 3:10 too, both KJV and RSV translate it as “kindness,” but the NAB and NLT translate it as “loyal” and “loyalty” respectively. In one of his focuses on grammar, exegesis and commentary on the Jonah and Ruth, Chisholm, Jr. (2006:64) also translates it as “loyalty, allegiance, devotion, faithfulness,” and quotes the NASB as also translating it as “loyalty” or “faithfulness.”

Issues of translation of “חֶסֶד (Hesed)”

There are striking features of translations of חֶסֶד (Hesed) particularly from NIV. Though the word appears as nouns in both Jonah 2:9, חֶסְדָּם, and Ruth 2:20, חֶסֶדּוֹ, with suffixes that are similar in person (3rd) and gender (masculine) and only differ in terms of number, (the former is plural while the latter is singular), the noun is translated as “grace” in Jonah but “kindness” in Ruth. Why this inconsistency? Again, Chisholm provides the answer. He notes,

The meaning of a word is established by usage among a community of speakers in a given time period. When used by a community of speakers, words can develop a wide range of semantic nuances and/or become specialized...When trying to determine the meaning of a word in a specific context, one cannot view the term in isolation, but be alert to various context and linguistic factors (p. 32).

Most probably then, an important issue that one should realize from the above is that context determines the different forms of translation and even the appropriate term(s) to be used.

How “חֶסֶד (hesed)” is applied

The different forms of translations from the various translations of scripture demonstrate how rich the word “חֶסֶד (hesed)” is in terms of application. In the books of Jonah and Ruth, different characters individually encountered and expressed “חֶסֶד (hesed)” depending upon their situation. At the same time, the different Bible translations decided to explore the many options that the flexibility of the language offers. It is quite interesting that the main characters, namely Jonah and Ruth, experienced “חֶסֶד (hesed)” in seemingly opposite ways.

In the book of Jonah

In the book of Jonah, kindness is experienced in different ways by the characters. Throughout the book, kindness, particularly God’s kindness is shown in contrast to man’s wickedness and/or weakness. In the light of His covenant faithfulness, “God’s future is at least somewhat open. The future is shaped by what happens in that divine-human interaction in view of God’s honoring of relationships,” observed Fretheim (2007:130).

First, kindness is shown to a disobedient servant, the prophet Jonah, who decides to run away from God’s assignment by boarding a ship that is bound for a faraway destination in the opposite direction. Thrown from the ship to die in the sea, the Prophet is delivered by a big fish which swallows him and vomits him at the shore. Prout (n.d.:117-118) argued that Jonah chapter two tells nothing new about the human heart. For him, “what is eternally new, even if often forgotten, is the God whose love would not let Jonah perish...God is faithful to himself that we can joyfully trust him to be faithful to us-as faithful as he was to Jonah in Nineveh.” So, while inside the belly of the great fish, Jonah acknowledges the grace that came his way in 2:9, as accordingly recorded: מִשְׁמְרִים הַבְּלִי-שָׁא חֶסֶדָם יַעֲזֹבוּ:

In the statement above, the exact word to be translated as “grace” (by NIV; other versions use different words) is חֶסֶדָם (noun with 3mp pron. suff.). It appears in the phrase of the text: יַעֲזֹבוּ חֶסֶדָם, “...They will forsake (abandon, leave, etc) the grace (kindness, favor, mercy, etc.) that is theirs.” The main verb of the sentence יַעֲזֹבוּ is a weak RI Guttural (or Pe Guttural) verb. Its root is עזב, and is a qal imperf. 3mp. It is the verb of מִשְׁמְרִים, a Piel participle masculine plural word (from the verb root שָׁמַר) that is functioning here as a substantive noun. Since the suffix of the main noun, חֶסֶדָם, is plural, its function is quite unclear; whether it is in reference to Jonah himself who of course is singular or to people in general. Chisholm (p. 64) agrees to this ambiguity when he notes, “It is not certain if it is subjective or objective.” This issue has opened the verse up to various interpretations and translations. The problem centers on whether God is clearly revealed as the source of the “חֶסֶד (hesed)” or it is something that naturally belongs to mankind (Jonah) and therefore returns in times of trouble.

In the case of the NIV translation; “the grace that could be theirs,” Gaebelein commented that since “grace” (חֶסֶד ; hesed) is a covenant word, we may therefore question the translation of the text. According to him, “if Jonah was thinking of idolaters among his own people, “steadfast love” or some similar rendering is called for. If, as is more probable, he was thinking of the sailors, then we should choose between “forsake their true loyalty” (RSV) and “may abandon their loyalty”” (1985:378). The KJV has “their own mercy”; while others have different forms: “all God’s mercies” (NLT), “their faithfulness” (NAS). This problem, notwithstanding, Jonah enjoys grace and expresses appreciation to God by the kind of prayer he utters while in the belly of the fish.

Another example of “חֶסֶד (hesed)” is when the prophet Jonah goes and warns Nineveh of their wickedness, in order to turn them from any impending punishment of God. Here, the grace of God, substituted by the noun compassion (in the NIV), is shown in spite of the sin of humanity when He forgives the repentant city. In 4:2, Jonah openly admits to the demonstration of God’s חֶסֶד which is distinctly used in the text. Additionally, when Jonah becomes angry and decides to lie in the heat of the sun to die. In a sharp twist recorded in 4:3 Jonah, because he thought he had forfeited the grace that was due him, he now pleads for God to take his life for, according to him, “It is better for me to die than to live.” Thus, Gaebelein’s (1985:386) comment is appropriate here:

There can be little doubt when Jonah asked God to take away his life, he was consciously echoing Elijah’s words when he fled from Jezebel (1 Kings 19: 4). If that is so, there is much more in what Jonah said than lies on the surface. He was virtually saying to God, “I have devoted my life to your service as your servant, as your prophet. But what I have experienced of you just does not make sense of the world order in which I find myself. Why should I go on living, for to leave your service would make my life purposeless. Once, in the past, you showed Elijah that there was a deeper purpose in life than he realized. Have you perhaps a similar message for me?”

Once again, God shows grace and causes a gourd to grow overnight to provide a shade for him. But Jonah again becomes angry because a worm eats up the gourd. This time, God reveals his kindness “חֶסֶד (hesed)” by rebuking Jonah for showing concerns to the gourd more than the 120,000 people of the city of Nineveh. Then also, “חֶסֶד (hesed)” is shown to sailors at sea when God raises a great storm against their ship because it was carrying a runaway servant. However, God saves them after Jonah has been taken out of the ship when he admits his guilt.

In the book of Ruth

As mentioned earlier, the issue of “חֶסֶד (hesed)” runs at the background of the book of Ruth or finds open expressions in the book. The family of Naomi leaves the land of Judah to stay in the land of Moab because of famine. Whether it is God who caused the death of Naomi’s husband and sons or not is not mentioned in the Bible, but clearly, God shows his kindness to Naomi by sparing her life and granting her the opportunity to return to her country. Acknowledging such a virtue of God, Naomi shares it with her daughters-in-laws when she prays that the Lord will

show חֶסֶד to them as they had done to her deceased relatives and herself (Ruth 1:8). Here, the noun חֶסֶד is precisely translated by NIV as “kindness,” but KJV, NAS and NKJ use the adjective “kindly,” which fall directly in the same line.

A surprise package of “kindness” is shown to Naomi by the decision of Ruth, the daughter-in-law who was probably married to Kilion, Naomi’s younger son, to remain faithful to her till death. In the light of the fact that Naomi is left with no one to take care of her, Ruth’s declaration and loyalty to her is a great act of kindness and companionship provided by the Lord at her old age. Again, the services that Ruth renders to Naomi, i.e., going out to search for food so that they could live, are acts of “חֶסֶד (hesed), kindness. Here, Ruth goes out in search for food and God again shows kindness to Naomi by leading her-in-law to no other person’s farm than that of Boaz.

The virtue of “חֶסֶד (hesed) reaches a climax in a deserving form as demonstrated by the treatment that Boaz gives to Ruth. He does this by allowing her to glean freely among the laborers and instructing them to treat her kindly. And he tops all these demonstrations up by providing food for her to which Ruth testifies (2:13). Collins (1993:100-101) made an observation on these extreme gestures thus:

Boaz in the book of Ruth *embodies* aspects of the character of God, most importantly his *hesed*. Note how in 2:12 Boaz wishes a blessing upon Ruth, who has taken refuge under the Lord's “wings”.... The “kindness” of Boaz (i.e. his *hesed*) is clearly visible in 2:8-9, 14-16, where Boaz far exceeds the requirements of mere legality in his generous treatment of Ruth (who reminded him in 2:10 that she was a mere foreigner, with no claim on his kindness).

As if what transpires between Boaz and Ruth are not enough, the acts of Boaz to Ruth are attested to by Naomi when Ruth returns home (2:20). The statement is quoted as follows: בָּרוּךְ הוּא לַיהוָה אֲשֶׁר לֹא־עָזַב חֶסֶדּוֹ אֶת־הַחַיִּים וְאֶת־הַמֵּתִים ; that is, “The LORD bless him...He has not stopped showing his kindness to the living and the dead.” At a quick glance, the statement appears simply: the exact noun derivative in the Hebrew scripture is חֶסֶדּוֹ (noun with 3ms pron. suff.). However when one considers the phrase more critically, לֹא־עָזַב חֶסֶדּוֹ אֲשֶׁר בָּרוּךְ הוּא לַיהוָה ; “Blessed is he of the Lord who has not forsaken his kindness,” then one notices a translational difficulty. Clearly, the pronoun, הוּא (he) is the object of the word בָּרוּךְ (blessed; qal passive participle masc. sing.). The noun, חֶסֶדּוֹ (noun with 3ms pron. suff.) is also the object of the preceding weak RI Guttural verb, עָזַב (qal perf. 3ms), with a negative particle, לֹא.

The problem is with the phrase, “...who has not forsaken...” What is unclear here is which of the persons is the antecedent of the relative pronoun אֲשֶׁר (who, that, which, etc.) in the phrase? That is, does the relative pronoun אֲשֶׁר refer to “the Lord” or Boaz? Scholars are not in agreement on this issue. And because of these uncertainties, there are different translations, with some versions like KJV, NAB, NAS, RSV, referring to “kindness” in the sentence as coming from the Lord, and other translations like NIV, NLT, referring to it as coming from Boaz. For

example, according to one scholar, “Naomi acknowledged that it was the Lord who had not stopped showing his “kindness” (*hesed*; the same word used in 1:8) to the living and dead (cf. Gen. 24:27; 2 Sam 2:5). This interpretation, according to Gaebelein (1992:533) hinges on understanding the antecedent of the relative particle... (“who”; NIV, “he”) to be the Lord...” In the context of this statement, one would safely accept אֲשֶׁר as referring to the Lord since this relative pronoun appears immediately after the proper noun, הַיְהוָה .

However, Chisholm argues, “This understanding of the construction is not accurate. The antecedent of אֲשֶׁר is Boaz, not the Lord.” He explains it this way; “When אֲשֶׁר follows the blessing formula בָּרַךְ (qal passive participle) + proper name/pronoun, it always introduces the reason the recipient of the blessing deserves a reward” (p. 72). Thus, he refers to 2 Samuel 2:5 as the closest structural parallel to Ruth 2:20 to buttress his position. This position is supported by that of Bush (1985:135):

Although in v19 Naomi immediately blesses this unknown person, she cannot yet deem the action as *hesed*. As soon as she knows it is Boaz, however, a second invocation is called for, blessing him for *hesed* because she recognizes that his action spring from his relationship to both women through his kinship with Elimelech...the man is a relative of ours; he is among those who have the responsibility of redeeming us.” Boaz’s actions then, are very properly deemed *hesed* by Naomi.

But while there is no clarity here, the fact still remains that kindness is shown by one of them, God or Boaz, to Naomi through her daughter-in-law, Ruth.

On the other hand, Boaz also testifies that Ruth’s move to visit him privately as her ‘kinsman redeemer’ is a demonstration of “חֶסֶד (*hesed*), translated mostly as kindness (3:10). Here, Mann (2010:179) posited that the noun derivative used, חֶסֶדֶךָ (noun with 2fs pron. suff.) is in direct reference to Ruth, who is the subject of the noun, and that Ruth herself models “fidelity” (*hesed*). Boaz, in the view of Gaebelein (1992:537), was flattered by Ruth’s kindness in seeking him out, and from the statement, “This kindness is greater than that which you showed earlier,” (a reference to Ruth’s kindness to Naomi in not forsaking her; cf. 2: 11), it is increasingly clear that Boaz interpreted Ruth’s bold action as a request for marriage.

Additionally, Boaz’s acceptance to marry Ruth is the greatest act of kindness to both women, particularly Naomi, because Boaz could have had other options. But in the present circumstance, he decides to work things out so that he could properly marry Ruth to fulfill a family obligation to Naomi, as demanded by the Law on levirate marriage. Guerra buttressed this position when he noted that ‘the practice of levirate marriage is rationalized because of the necessity of producing heirs.’ In similar vein, Ruth’s preparedness to accept Boaz as a kinsman-redeemer was an issue of kindness which cannot be glossed over. Ideally, in many cultures, if a man has acquired sufficient means to sustain marriage he could marry. But the custom, according to Guerra, was that, “All women and men, including Israelite priests were expected to marry at an early age, shortly after puberty” (2002:5).

The difference in age between Boaz and Ruth was also a factor in the determination of who was showing kindness to the other. Deducing from Boaz’s address of Ruth as “my daughter” (2:8; cf.

3:10, 11) and his description of the men of Ruth's age as הַבְּחוּרִים ; "the younger men" (3:10), he could no doubt be older than Ruth. So, for Ruth to accept him as a kinsman redeemer was in itself a great demonstration of kindness from her which he testified of (3:10). However, Mann (p. 178) commented that overall, what does connect both property and progeny in the last chapter is family loyalty, and that the thematic keyword which is "loyalty," or "kindness," or "fidelity" coming from חֶסֶד (hesed), "is central to the deleted midnight scene."

Apparently, Boaz's desire to redeem Ruth shows that he was prepared to begin a family, which according to Borowski (2003:16), 'was the focal point of village life.' As expected in nature, the attitude of couple has usually been that of a universal longing for, and joy in the giving birth. Thus, Matthews expected life for the newly wedded is earnest duty because 'the primary purpose of a marriage in biblical times was to produce an heir' (2006:38). Usually, there would be the desire on the part of the couple that the baby shall be a boy since they are wanted to increase the size, wealth, and importance of the family group or clan. When they grow up and marry, they also bring home with them their wives and children of such unions, and perpetuate the father's house.

Interestingly, if boys increase the house; girls are thought of as decreasing it because they usually go to live with their husbands. At the climax of this discussion is the fact that no less kindness is shown to Boaz in the birth of Obed. Indeed, this kindness is shown to the whole of Israel and humanity because Obed's son, Jesse, gives birth to David, who later becomes the greatest king of Israel, and through whom Jesus the Savior of humanity is born. For Mann (p. 178), Ruth provides an all-too-brief moment in which we see the community of Israel as it *could be* if kindness were in its heart. This is because the family rooted in חֶסֶד (hesed) "builds up" that community in extraordinary ways that transcend their own ordinary lives, ways that they may never know.

Conclusion

The discussion has shown the engagement of people in the books of Jonah and Ruth with חֶסֶד (hesed) including the key characters in both books. Looking at it from different angles, one sees Jonah experiencing it while running from God, while in the case of Ruth it was while running to God. It is also apparent from the engagements of the two books that anytime חֶסֶד (hesed) is positively experienced by people, the usual outcome glorifies God and may spark spontaneous expression of praise and appreciation. Consider the following example: The sailors feared God (Jonah 1:16); the Ninevites repented (Jonah 3:5-10); Jonah acknowledged God's gracious acts (Jonah 4:2); Naomi blessed God for kindness shown to Ruth (2:20); both Ruth and Boaz expressed appreciation to each other for the kindness received from each other (Ruth 2:13; 3:10); and the women of Naomi's town blessed God for mercies shown to Naomi (Ruth 4:14).

The study of חֶסֶד (hesed) has helped to unearth lots of issues with regards to its rich application. In applying the experiences here to life, people everywhere especially Christians should never cease to appreciate God and one another for the countless experiences of חֶסֶד (hesed), that come our way every day. When the value of such a virtue is clearly understood, ones' attitude to the Bible as the Word of life becomes meaningful.

References

- Britt, B. (2003) "Unexpected Attachments: A Literary Approach to the Term *ṭōṭin* in the Hebrew Bible," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, Vol. 27.3, p. 289.
- Borowski, O. (2003). *Daily Life in Biblical Times* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), p. 16.
- Bush, F. (1985) *Word Biblical Commentary: Ruth and Esther* (Vol. 9). (Waco, Texas; Word Books, Pub.), p. 135.
- Chisholm, R. B. (2006). *A Workbook for Intermediate Hebrew: Grammar, Exegesis, and Commentary on Jonah and Ruth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications), p. 6
- Chisholm, R. B. (1998). *From Exegesis to Exposition: A Practical Guide to Using Biblical Hebrew* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1998.), p. 32.
- Collins, C. J. (1993). Ambiguity and Theology in Ruth: Ruth 1:21 and 2:20, *Presbyterian: Covenant Seminary Review* 19/2 (1993): pp. 100-101.
- Bush, F. (1985) *Word Biblical Commentary: Ruth and Esther* (Vol. 9). (Waco, Texas; Word Books, Pub.), p. 135.
- Fretheim, T.E. (Spring 2007). "The Exaggerated God of Jonah," *Word & World* 27, no. 2, p. 130.
- Gaebelein, F. E. (1992). *Expositor's Bible Commentary (with the New International Version): Deuteronomy–2 Samuel*.
Volume 3 (Grand Rapids, Michigan; Zondervan Publishing House), p. 521.
- *Expositor's Bible Commentary (with the New International Version): Daniel – Minor Prophets Volume* . (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1985), p. 386.
- Guerra, A. J. (2002). *Family Matters: The Role of Christianity in the Formation of the Western Family* (St. Paul, Minnesota: Paragon House), p. 5.
- Holladay, W. L. (1988). *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company), p. 111.
- Mann, T. W. (April 2010). "Ruth 4," *Interpretation*, p. 179.
- Matthews, V. H. (2006). *Manners and Customs in the Bible: An Illustrated Guide to Daily Life in Bible Times*, 3rd edition (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.), p. 38.
- Prout, E. (n.d.). "Sermon: God and Jonah's prayers." *Restoration Quarterly*: pp. 117-118.

Stuart, D. (1985). *Word Biblical Commentary: 1 Kings*. (Waco, Texas; Word Books, Publisher), p. 478.

Zodhiates, S. (1996). Old Testament Lexical Aids: Hesed. *The Hebrew-Greek Key Study Bible: NIV* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers.), p. 1516.