



Grace Unveiled: The Charm of חסד in the Book of Ruth and Its Transformative Message for Christian Life

Marde Christian Stenly Mawikere¹, Sudiria Hura², Christie Garry Mewengkang³

^{1,2} Institut Agama Kristen Negeri (IAKN) Manado, Sulawesi Utara, Indonesia

³ Philippine Normal University (PNU) Manila, Philippines

ABSTRACT

This article delves into the significance of *Hesed*, or loyal love, in the Book of Ruth, examining its theological implications for both human-divine relationships and interpersonal connections. It investigates how *Hesed* is depicted in the narrative of Ruth and Boaz, elucidating its role in worship and daily life. Methodologically, the study involves a close textual analysis of the Book of Ruth, employing a theological lens to interpret God's message of steadfast love. The findings reveal a profound understanding of God's inclusive and universal *Hesed*, with implications extending into the New Testament through the actions of Jesus Christ. This underscores the significance of God's unwavering love as a guiding principle in our relationships with both God and fellow humans, shaping a life reflective of the values encapsulated in *Hesed*.

Keywords: God, Jesus Christ, Hesed, relationship

Article history

Submitted: Nov. 11, 2023

Revised: July 03, 2024

Accepted: July 12, 2024

Corresponding author: Marde Christian Stenly Mawikere (mardestenly@gmail.com)

How to cite this article:

Mawikere, M.C.S., Hura, S., & Mewengkang, C.G. (2024). Grace Unveiled: The Charm of חסד in the Book of Ruth and Its Transformative Message for Christian Life. *Evangelikal: Jurnal Teologi Injili dan Pembinaan Warga Jemaat*. 8 (2): 115-133. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.46445/ejti.v8i2.744>

This is an open-access article under the CC BY-SA license



The images or other third-party material in this article are included in the Creative Commons license unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. Suppose material is not included in the Creative Commons license article and your intended use is prohibited by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use. In that case, you must obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

INTRODUCTION

Old Testament scholars and theologians, exemplified by Hill & Walton (2009), extensively analyze the central themes of the Book of Ruth, particularly focusing on the Kinsman/Redeemer motif and the concept of *חסד* (*Hesed*) (Thambyrajah, 2021; Umeanolue, 2022). Their analyses underscore the profound significance of *חסד* in unravelling the narrative's depth, especially in understanding human relationships and their divine underpinnings. However, these discussions highlight an urgent need for further investigation.

Questions persist regarding the interpretation of *חסד* within the Book of Ruth: Could there be potential misinterpretations? Are there overlooked dimensions or challenges hindering readers from fully grasping the book's central message? Addressing these inquiries is crucial to establish a clear rationale for this study.

To contextualize this research within broader academic discourse, engagement with contemporary scholarship is essential. While foundational insights from Hill & Walton (2009) and Howard Jr (2007) remain pertinent, integrating recent studies from the past decade that align with or complement the present inquiry can enrich the discourse. Through critical evaluation and comparison with previous research, the novelty and distinct contributions of the current study can be more effectively delineated.

God's unwavering commitment is evident in His faithfulness to His people, particularly Israel, where He remains loyal and never forsakes them (Moraff, 2023; Murphy, 2020; Scholtz, 2017; Tjhin & Dendeng, 2022). Furthermore, He rewards them for their allegiance to Him. The robust essence of loyalty (*חסד*) is also mirrored in the characters, figures, and scenes narrated in the Book of Ruth. Consequently, most interpreters perceive the crucial messages in the book as reflections on faithfulness (*חסד*), encompassing God's profound faithfulness, fidelity among individuals, and the significance of steadfast relationships within the family (De Waard & Nida, 1992).

In the Book of Ruth, the term *חסד* appears three times, specifically in Ruth 1:8, 2:20, and 3:10, and is employed in the context of relationships involving God, Ruth, Boaz, and Orpah. It is translated as "love" and "faithfulness," encompassing meanings such as "loyalty" and "commitment." Concerning Israel's connection with God, *חסד* is linked to God's fidelity to the covenant (*ברית* – *berîyth*) established with His people, while also underscoring the commitment of God's people to the *ברית* or covenant (Hill & Walton, 2009).

Regarding *חסד*, both from God and humans, it is a crucial element that defines the figures, characters, and scenes in the Book of Ruth, making the exploration of its meaning a matter of great significance. When employed in human relationships, *חסד* denotes attachment or loyalty to a promise, agreement, or friendship, as seen in, for instance, 1 Samuel 20:8. When used in reference to God, it emphasizes God's loyal love for His promises; hence, *חסד* is often translated as "faithful love" (as in Psalm 51:3).

However, in Job 6:14, it is also translated as "compassion" (Sakenfeld, 1978). Some also interpret חַסְדִּים as "mercy" (Hillebrecht, 2012).

The translation of חַסְדִּים as "Loving Kindness" or "Mercy" more precisely points to the aspect of God's grace, which is steadfast and always faithful to the covenant (בְּרִית) or His promises, as evidenced in numerous texts in the Old Testament (Kelman, 2013; Magness & Gitin, 1998). Some theologians even propose alternative interpretations that involve examining חַסְדִּים in the context of the godly lives of Ruth and Boaz, the primary characters in the Book of Ruth (Fischer, 2002; Glueck, 1967). Consequently, this research aims to depict the reality of faithful love (חַסְדִּים) between God and humans and among humans, as articulated in the Book of Ruth.

Furthermore, the introductory section should succinctly outline the research problem and objectives, refraining from delving into the intricacies of the research approach. This approach ensures clarity and provides readers with a clear roadmap for navigating subsequent sections. Detailed discussions on the research methodology should be reserved for dedicated sections to maintain a streamlined and focused presentation.

The central research question emerges from scholarly discussions on the Book of Ruth: Is there potential for misinterpretation of חַסְדִּים , and are there overlooked dimensions or challenges hindering a comprehensive understanding of its message? The novelty of this study lies in its exploration of חַסְדִּים within the Book of Ruth through recent scholarly insights, complementing foundational works like Hill & Walton (2009) and Howard Jr (2007). By critically evaluating these perspectives, this research aims to delineate its unique contributions to understanding loyalty, faithfulness, and divine-human relationships in the narrative.

The objective of this research is to explore the multifaceted concept of חַסְדִּים in the Book of Ruth within a contemporary scholarly framework. The narrative of Ruth, rich with theological depth, illuminates themes of loyalty, faithfulness, and divine providence, particularly through the characters of Ruth and Boaz. While previous scholarship has established a foundational understanding of these themes, there is a critical need to further explore the nuances of חַסְדִּים and its relevance for contemporary readers.

To address this need, this research adopts a thematic approach, focusing on the interplay between human relationships and divine covenantal loyalty as portrayed in the narrative of Ruth. By closely examining the occurrences of חַסְדִּים within the text and contextualizing them within the broader theological framework of the Old Testament, this study aims to shed light on the significance of חַסְדִּים as a guiding principle for ethical living and spiritual devotion.

The methodology employed in this research draws upon both traditional exegesis and contemporary literary analysis techniques. By synthesizing insights from diverse scholarly perspectives and engaging with the text in its original Hebrew context,

this study seeks to offer fresh interpretations of familiar passages and uncover previously overlooked dimensions of the narrative.

In addition to contributing to academic discourse on the Book of Ruth, this research also seeks to offer practical insights for contemporary readers. By exploring the timeless themes of loyalty, faithfulness, and divine love embedded within the narrative, this study aims to inspire readers to cultivate deeper relationships with both God and their fellow human beings.

In conclusion, this research aims to enhance our comprehension of the Book of Ruth and its pertinence to contemporary faith and spirituality (Karman, 2013). By delving into the depths of *רֶחֶם* and its implications for human relationships and divine providence, this study endeavors to illuminate the enduring truths contained within this ancient biblical text. The novelty of this research lies in its integration of traditional understanding with a contemporary approach to analyzing the Book of Ruth, with a particular emphasis on the concept of *רֶחֶם*. It recognizes the urgency for further investigation into the interpretation of *רֶחֶם* within the book, addressing potential misinterpretations and overlooked dimensions. Through the integration of recent research and highlighting the distinct contributions of the current study, the aim is to enrich the discourse on the Book of Ruth.

Moreover, this research seeks to explore the multifaceted concept of *רֶחֶם* within a contemporary scholarly framework, offering new interpretations and elucidating its significance for ethical living and spiritual devotion today. Employing a thematic approach and synthesizing perspectives from various angles, this study endeavors to uncover previously overlooked dimensions of the narrative, ultimately enriching our understanding of the Book of Ruth and its relevance to contemporary faith and spirituality.

METHOD

The methodological approach employed in this research transcends mere thematic analysis and literature review, delving into the realm of biblical interpretation through the use of hermeneutics (Gilbert et al., 2018; Margaret, 2019). Recognizing the nuanced meanings of the term *רֶחֶם* in different contexts within the Old Testament, an exegetical approach is adopted to dissect its significance within the narrative of the Book of Ruth. Through exegetical analysis, the aim is to delve deeper into the varied connotations of *רֶחֶם* and its implications for understanding the overarching themes of the text.

To provide readers with a comprehensive understanding of the hermeneutic approach utilized in this study, it is essential to reference scholarly works that expound on this methodology. Notably, scholars such as Hubbard Jr. (1988), and Howard Jr. (2007), and Longman III (2015) have extensively elucidated the principles and techniques of hermeneutics, particularly within the context of biblical interpretation. By

drawing attention to these scholarly resources, readers can delve further into the theoretical underpinnings and practical applications of hermeneutics in biblical studies.

Moreover, integrating reader response analysis alongside exegetical inquiry enriches the interpretative framework of this research. By considering how contemporary readers engage with and interpret the message of *ḥesed* in the Book of Ruth, a more holistic understanding of its relevance to modern Christian life and faith is attained. This approach bridges the gap between ancient texts and present-day contexts, facilitating a meaningful dialogue between the biblical narrative and its implications for contemporary believers.

In summary, the methodological approach of this research encompasses both exegetical analysis and reader response analysis, providing a multifaceted exploration of the theme of *ḥesed* in the Book of Ruth. By referencing scholarly literature on hermeneutics and highlighting the integration of reader response analysis, this study endeavors to offer a robust framework for interpreting and applying the message of loyal love within the biblical text.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Unveiling the Multifaceted Meaning of *ḥesed* in the Narrative of Ruth: An Exegetical Exploration

The Book of Ruth occupies a significant position within the Jewish canon, particularly among the Megillot, a collection of five biblical scrolls noteworthy for amplifying female voices' departure from the norm in biblical literature. It recounts the journey of two marginalized women as they transition from destitution to prosperity (Kugler & Magori, 2023). Scholars traditionally interpret the protagonists' positive transformation as a consequence of their exemplary behavior (Hill & Walton, 2009). Contemporary scholars like Bergant and Karris (2002) and Kelman (2013) further emphasize the central theme of *ḥesed*, or loving-kindness, in the narrative. They argue that Ruth's story underscores the importance of practising *ḥesed* and enduring adversity, offering profound insights into commendable human attributes.

Support for *ḥesed* as a pivotal theme is discernible through three primary storylines: the bond between Ruth and Naomi, Ruth's interactions with Boaz, and God's provision for His people (Kapojos & Wijaya, 2018; Mawikere & Hura, 2022). Despite the limited use of the term *ḥesed* in the text, scholars assert its significance based on the depicted acts of kindness and compassion. However, these acts are portrayed not merely as altruistic gestures but also as strategic maneuvers employed by the protagonists to navigate societal constraints and uncertainties.

The initial reference to *ḥesed* emerges in Naomi's plea for her daughters-in-law's welfare, invoking divine kindness upon them for their past actions. Nonetheless, scholars suggest Naomi's words may carry undertones of formality rather than genuine

warmth, as she simultaneously urges them to return to their homeland. Faced with a dilemma, the daughters-in-law make disparate choices, with Orpah opting for her familiar community while Ruth exhibits her commitment by choosing to remain with Naomi and embracing her faith. Ruth's decision is often lauded as an embodiment of *ḥesed*, symbolizing her selflessness and loyalty. Nevertheless, scholars debate Ruth's conversion and motivations, suggesting pragmatic considerations, such as seeking a better future in Bethlehem, might influence her decision (Kugler & Magori, 2023).

The introduction of Boaz as a pivotal figure marks a significant narrative development. Ruth's deliberate actions to glean in Boaz's field reflect her strategic efforts to gain his favor and ensure her and Naomi's well-being. While Boaz's kindness towards Ruth is evident, scholars question whether his actions stem solely from genuine compassion or if there are underlying motives, such as securing a valuable asset in Ruth. Boaz's interactions with Ruth illustrate his admiration for her character and sacrifices. However, his motives may not be entirely altruistic, considering his potential gains from their association. Similarly, Ruth's actions, while commendable, might also be driven by a desire to improve her social status and secure her future rather than solely motivated by selfless love (Kugler & Magori, 2023).

The culmination of the narrative sees Boaz maneuvering to secure Ruth's hand in marriage, ensuring the continuity of Naomi's lineage. While the birth of a child is celebrated as a divine blessing, it also serves as a means of securing Ruth and Naomi's welfare. The ambiguity surrounding Naomi's role in the child's upbringing raises questions about her intentions and relationship with Ruth. Naomi's actions throughout underscore her pursuit of security and stability, even if it entails orchestrating events to her advantage. Ruth's compliance with Naomi's plans demonstrates her loyalty but also asserts her agency in navigating complex social dynamics (Mawikere & Hura, 2022). Naomi's prominence in the narrative sometimes eclipses Ruth's contributions, despite Ruth's significant sacrifices and acts of *ḥesed*. Naomi's directives to Ruth, particularly concerning her encounter with Boaz, reveal her inclination to control the situation and secure Ruth's future. However, Ruth's agency emerges as she deviates from Naomi's plan and asserts her desires (Kugler & Magori, 2023). Ruth's initiative in taking matters into her own hands showcases her astuteness and independence. By reframing her interactions with Boaz and asserting her identity, Ruth exhibits her ability to navigate intricate social dynamics while upholding her values. Ultimately, Ruth's actions challenge conventional gender roles, highlighting her resilience and determination in shaping her destiny.

In initiating the discourse, an exegesis of the term *ḥesed* within the context of the Book of Ruth is paramount to establish a foundational understanding for the subsequent discussions. *ḥesed* holds multifaceted meanings and implications throughout the Old Testament, warranting a comprehensive examination of its significance specifically

within the narrative framework of Ruth. This exegesis endeavors to unveil the nuanced layers of *חסד* as it manifests in the interactions, relationships, and overarching themes of the biblical text.

Scholars such as Hubbard Jr. (1988), in his seminal work “The Book of Ruth: New International Commentary on the Old Testament,” offers invaluable insights into the exegetical exploration of *חסד* within Ruth's narrative landscape. Hubbard meticulously dissects the occurrences of *חסד* within Ruth, illuminating its implications for familial bonds, covenantal commitments, and divine providence. Through a rigorous exegetical analysis, Hubbard elucidates how *חסד* serves as a thematic linchpin, weaving together the disparate threads of the narrative into a cohesive tapestry of loyalty, compassion, and steadfast love.

Furthermore, scholars such as Longman III (2015), in “*A Commentary on the Book of Ruth*,” contributes to the exegesis of *חסד* by contextualizing its usage within the broader socio-cultural milieu of ancient Israel. Longman's exegetical insights shed light on the cultural norms, relational dynamics, and theological underpinnings that inform the portrayal of *חסד* in Ruth. Through a synthesis of historical, literary, and theological analyses, Longman enriches our understanding of *חסד* as a central motif that resonates across temporal and cultural boundaries.

By embarking on this exegetical journey, we lay a solid groundwork for the subsequent discussions, enabling a more nuanced and informed exploration of the theme of *חסד* within the Book of Ruth. Through engagement with scholarly exegesis, we endeavour to unravel the rich tapestry of meanings encapsulated within this pivotal term, thereby illuminating the profound insights it offers into the divine-human relationship and the intricacies of human interactions as depicted in the biblical narrative.

Building upon the scholarly exegesis provided by Hubbard Jr. (1988) and Longman III (2015), we delve deeper into the textual nuances of the Book of Ruth to unravel the multifaceted meanings of *חסד*. One aspect of this exploration involves tracing the semantic range of *חסד* across its various occurrences within the text, discerning subtle shifts in its connotations and contextual significance. Additionally, we endeavor to elucidate how the thematic motif of *חסד* intersects with other prominent themes such as redemption, providence, and identity formation in the narrative of Ruth.

Moreover, our exegetical inquiry extends beyond mere linguistic analysis to encompass a hermeneutical exploration of the socio-historical context in which the Book of Ruth emerged. By situating the text within the broader socio-cultural milieu of ancient Israel, we gain insights into the lived experiences, cultural practices, and religious beliefs that shaped the portrayal of *חסד* within the narrative. This contextual understanding enriches our interpretation of *חסד* as a dynamic and culturally embedded concept that resonates deeply with the audience of the text.

Furthermore, our exegetical journey serves not only to elucidate the textual complexities of *רֹחַ* but also to facilitate a deeper engagement with its theological implications. By discerning how *רֹחַ* reflects the character of God, the nature of covenantal relationships, and the ethical imperatives for human conduct, we unearth the profound theological truths embedded within the narrative of Ruth. Through this theological lens, *רֹחַ* emerges not merely as a literary device but as a profound expression of divine grace, human virtue, and relational fidelity.

In summation, our exegetical exploration of *רֹחַ* within the Book of Ruth offers a holistic and multifaceted understanding of this central theme. By integrating linguistic analysis, socio-historical contextualization, and theological reflection, we aspire to unveil the rich tapestry of meanings encapsulated within *רֹחַ* and its profound significance for both ancient audiences and contemporary readers alike.

Loving Kindness *רֹחַ* as the Link between Humans and God in the Book of Ruth

Based on a theological approach to the narrative flow of the Book of Ruth, it is revealed that the story and the history of salvation by God (*Heilsgeschichte*) have a universal and inclusive dimension. Ruth, who comes from Moabite lineage, becomes a key figure in this narrative. The genealogy listed in Ruth 4:18-22 indicates that King David comes from a mixed lineage, including Moabite descent. This genealogy is possibly derived from 1 Chronicles 2:9-15 and is later quoted in the New Testament concerning the genealogy of Jesus Christ in Matthew 1:3-6 and Luke 3:31-33. The purpose is to emphasize that God's salvation applies to all nations without exception (Ludji, 2009). The story in the Book of Ruth affirms that Ruth's Moabite origin did not hinder her from being an instrument in God's plan. Surprisingly, Ruth even becomes one of the ancestors of the Davidic dynasty.

Theologians argue that the Book of Ruth aims to provide a perspective on the Davidic dynasty originating from a Moabite woman (Adamczewski, 2023; Chapman, 2023; Scheunemann, 2011; Stahlberg, 2008). This aligns with a broad sense of universality, serving as an alternative to narrow Israeli nationalism. In other words, God demonstrates mercy (*רֹחַ*) not only to Israel but also to other nations (Scheunemann, 2011). The prominence of non-Israelite elements and characters in the Book of Ruth indirectly indicates that the concept of inclusivity has been present since the early history of salvation/*Heilsgeschichte* (Karman, 2009). Although initially God chose Israel exclusively, Israel had a mission to express mercy (*רֹחַ*) to other nations, as seen in the love story of Boaz and Ruth (Ludji, 2009).

In a broader context, the vision of inclusivism in the Book of Ruth is indeed a manifestation of God's mercy (*רֹחַ*) toward the covenant (*ברית* - *berîyth*) He made with Abraham. There are at least three times when God establishes a covenant (*ברית*) with Abraham with the same content, as recorded in Genesis 12:1-8, 15:1-6, and 17:1-8. One

of the terms of the covenant is that through Abraham and his descendants, all nations in the world will receive blessings, and Abraham will be the "father of many nations." In the context of this covenant, Israel's purpose in the world is to bring nations into a relationship with the saving God (Genesis 12:1-3; Exodus 19:5-6), and specifically, the covenant reveals God's mercy and hospitality to sinful humanity (Guthrie et al., 1970).

As part of this promise, God accepts anyone who believes in Him and His covenant, regardless of race, gender, or nationality, much like Ruth, who originated from Moab. Deuteronomy 29:3 states that the people of Ammon and Moab shall not enter the assembly of the Lord even to the tenth generation. Being part of the assembly of the Lord means "being a true Israelite and participating in worshiping the LORD." Meanwhile, the significance of the tenth generation implies forever (Zuck et al., 2005). However, as evident in the story of Ruth, God seems to "bypass" the stipulation in the Law by including Ruth, who is from Moab, as one of His people. This illustrates God's unlimited mercy (חסד) (Zuck et al., 2005).

The Book of Ruth explicitly declares God's mercy (חסד) in fulfilling the vision of inclusivism toward nations, both Israel and other nations (גוי). God's loyal love (חסד) is also concretely expressed to Ruth, a Moabite whom God chose to play a significant role in the history of salvation, becoming an ancestor to King David and ultimately, Jesus Christ (Bruce, 2008; Carson, 2015).

In the Book of Ruth, God's mercy (חסד) toward humanity is reflected through various aspects, one of which is related to God's providence (Providencia Dei). The narrative of the Book of Ruth begins by depicting a famine in the land of Israel, forcing Elimelech and his family to leave Bethlehem, Judah, and go to Moab. There, Elimelech's sons, Mahlon and Chilion, marry Moabite women, Orpah and Ruth. However, Elimelech and his two sons die in Moab. After the famine ends in Israel, Naomi decides to return to Bethlehem, and she urges her daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth, to stay in Moab. Naomi feels she can no longer provide them with husbands due to her old age (Ruth 1:12). Orpah returns to her people, while Ruth decides to stay with Naomi and even commits to follow the God of Israel (Ruth 1:16-17).

Upon returning to Bethlehem, Naomi and Ruth seek ways to meet their needs, especially food. Ruth goes to the field of Boaz, a wealthy relative of Elimelech. There, Boaz shows special attention to Ruth (Ruth 2:13), and Naomi considers Boaz's kindness as a gift of God's mercy (חסד) (Ruth 2:20). Naomi realizes that Boaz has the right and responsibility to redeem and marry Ruth, and eventually, the marriage between Boaz and Ruth comes to fruition (Ruth 4:13). The final scene of the Book of Ruth concludes with a narrative of the birth of Obed, the father of Jesse who will descend to David (Darmawijaya, 2009). It states here that God's mercy (חסד) is for Ruth, Boaz, Naomi, and all of Israel. Therefore, there is a reversal where Naomi, who had lost everything and become empty, now through Ruth and Boaz, becomes full again (Karman, 2009).

Through these scenes, the Book of Ruth illustrates how God's loyal love (רַחֲמֵי) is manifested in His providence over people facing various challenges, such as famine, sorrow, widowhood, poverty, and the struggle to earn a living (Gaebelein, 1992; Kapojos & Wijaya, 2018). The narrator of the Book of Ruth affirms that human life holds great value in the eyes of God and fellow humans. God's purpose in this world transcends the boundaries of nations and individuals. God demonstrates His mercy (רַחֲמֵי) through His involvement in the everyday life of a simple family in need of food every day (Atkinson, 2000).

God also provides material blessings to Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz, offering them rest. Through Boaz and Ruth, all of Israel is blessed, and on a broader scale, God's mercy (רַחֲמֵי) for the entire world is reflected through the marriage of Boaz and Ruth. This marriage serves as evidence that God's mercy (רַחֲמֵי) extends to all, including non-Israelites. The Book of Ruth demonstrates how Ruth, as a foreigner, becomes involved in God's covenant with Israel (Zuck et al., 2005). God's role as a caretaker in the Book of Ruth is evident through the experiences of the characters, such as Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz, encompassing all of Israel and the entire world. Although God may seem hidden in His actions, He controls events perfectly and continuously (Hubbard et al., 2014). As for the scenes in the Book of Ruth, they aim to demonstrate God's loving and faithful guidance (רַחֲמֵי) in the lives of Naomi and the family of Boaz and Ruth. The central figure in these scenes is God and His presence in the narrative, evident in Naomi's lament in Ruth 1:20-21 (Hubbard et al., 2014).

God's loving and faithful guidance (רַחֲמֵי) is seen in the events involving the characters in the Book of Ruth, reaching its climax in the joy of the women of Bethlehem when Naomi gives birth to a son (Ruth 4:17). God's loyal love is also reflected in the blessings Boaz imparts to Ruth. Boaz prays that the LORD may reward Ruth for her kindness and fully compensate her as someone seeking refuge under the wings of the LORD, the God of Israel (Ruth 2:12). Boaz also blesses Ruth because she has shown greater kindness than before, not seeking relationships with younger men, whether poor or rich (Ruth 3:10). Through the Book of Ruth, the message is conveyed that God has the power to save a stranger who was previously unaware of Him and provides a place of refuge for them (Ruth 1:9; 3:1). Thus, through the narrative of the Book of Ruth, constructed within the broader context of the Torah and the New Testament, we can concretely understand how God's mercy (רַחֲמֵי) is reflected in the fulfilment of the covenant and God's miraculous oversight.

Exploring Loving Kindness רַחֲמֵי in Human Relationships within the Book of Ruth

To trace the manifestation of loving kindness or mercy (רַחֲמֵי) in human relationships in the Book of Ruth, we need to investigate the main characters and events that shape the narrative of the Book of Ruth (Satterthwaite & McConville, 2007). As

previously explained, the term *ḥesed*, translated as “mercy” and “kindness,” appears in relation to God, Ruth, Boaz, and Orpah. Since Orpah only appears in the initial scenes of the Book of Ruth as the daughter-in-law who chooses to return to her family upon Naomi's advice, this article will focus on the characters of Ruth and Boaz. The character of Naomi emphasizes the experience of emptiness and loss, which later transforms into abundance and blessings with the arrival of Boaz and the role of Ruth in the story.

At the beginning of the Book of Ruth, we are presented with a portrayal of Ruth in a paradoxical situation. She faces significant burdens, losing her husband, father-in-law, and brother-in-law. Ruth becomes a widow living with Naomi and Orpah, two other widows. These are extremely challenging moments for Ruth, who has to share her fate with the other widows, Naomi and Orpah. However, in this situation, Ruth also has the freedom to choose her path, including returning to Moab, starting a new life, or finding a husband. When Naomi decides to return to Israel, she asks both her daughters-in-law to go back to their respective families. Orpah chooses to leave them and return to Moab, but Ruth decisively decides to stay with Naomi, with words full of commitment: “Do not urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go, I will go, and where you stay, I will stay.” This demonstrates Ruth's commitment and loyalty to Naomi, her people, and Naomi's God.

Although Naomi acknowledges that both Orpah and Ruth have shown kindness (*ḥesed*) to them, Ruth is the most committed, not only to her mother-in-law but also to God and the people of her mother-in-law. Ruth's loyal love for Naomi is also reflected in how she serves her mother-in-law, helps in finding food for them, and follows Naomi's instructions to approach Boaz. All these actions mirror Ruth's loyal love for Naomi and her desire to bring happiness to her mother-in-law.

After Ruth's marriage to Boaz, she continues to love Naomi by caring for her child and bringing joy to Naomi. Through Boaz's words about Ruth, we see that Ruth is someone who exhibits loyal love. Boaz blesses Ruth and acknowledges her goodness, praying that the Lord fully blesses Ruth for all she has done.

The name Ruth (*ṚṚṚ*), which has various meanings such as “female friend,” “refreshing,” “comforting,” and “seeing,” aligns with her character. Ruth's presence in the story brings freshness and blessings to Naomi and her family. She carefully pays attention to every word spoken by Naomi, and the loving kindness (*ḥesed*) she demonstrates leads them toward happiness and prosperity (Santoso, 2011).

When the narrator describes Ruth as a poor and marginalized foreigner, and Boaz, on the contrary, as a wealthy, honorable, integral, righteous, responsible, noble-hearted Israelite and also a relative of Elimelech, it creates a strong social contrast between them. Despite significant social differences between Ruth and Boaz, the narrator places them in equal positions and as figures to be admired or emulated (Karman, 2009).

In the second scene of the Book of Ruth, Boaz encounters Ruth while she is gleaning in his field. Boaz's treatment of Ruth exemplifies his adherence to prevailing cultural norms and his loyalty to his kin. Amidst a societal backdrop where widows and foreigners often face marginalization and vulnerability, Boaz extends kindness and protection toward Ruth, ensuring her comfort and safety within his domain. By inviting Ruth to partake in meals with the female reapers and instructing his workers to facilitate her gleaning without hindrance, Boaz demonstrates a compassionate and inclusive stance that transcends mere obligation (Karman, 2009).

To comprehend Ruth's actions and Boaz's response within their historical context, it is imperative to consider the customs and cultural expectations that governed their interactions. Ruth's decision to glean in Boaz's field reflects not only her dire economic circumstances but also her proactive efforts to provide for herself and her mother-in-law, Naomi. Boaz's benevolent treatment of Ruth underscores his commitment to upholding the principles of hospitality, generosity, and compassion prescribed by the societal norms of ancient Israel (Karman, 2009). His actions signify a conscientious adherence to the responsibilities incumbent upon him as a landowner and as a member of the Israelite community.

Furthermore, Boaz's decision to marry Ruth signifies a profound act of loyalty towards both Ruth and his kin. Despite the considerable social and cultural disparities between them, Boaz recognizes the intrinsic worth and dignity of Ruth as a person and as a member of his extended family. His willingness to marry Ruth, thereby assuming the role of kinsman-redeemer, exemplifies a sacrificial commitment to preserving the legacy of Mahlon and alleviating Naomi's destitution (Karman, 2009). Boaz's actions transcend the boundaries of self-interest, reflecting a deep-seated allegiance to familial obligations and communal well-being (Hubbard et al., 2014).

In essence, the narrative of Ruth and Boaz illustrates how loyalty, rooted in cultural norms and familial ties, transcends societal barriers and fosters solidarity and mutual support within the community. Through their exemplary conduct, Ruth and Boaz embody the timeless values of compassion, integrity, and selflessness, serving as enduring symbols of loyal love amidst the complexities of human relationships (Hubbard et al., 2014).

As for the name Boaz (בועז), which means “pillar” or “strength,” it aligns with his character of supporting and upholding the lives of Ruth, Naomi, and Elimelech's family (Santoso, 2011). Boaz is someone who provides support for fellow human beings. This is why Naomi says that Boaz should be blessed by the Lord who willingly extends His loyal love to both the living and the dead.

Through the Book of Ruth, readers are reminded that loyal love among fellow human beings is not only a reflection of God's loyal love but is also pleasing to God and receives His blessings (Groenen, 1992). Thus, it becomes evident through the story in

the Book of Ruth that loyal love (חסד) touches every aspect of human life—spiritual, physical, emotional, and social. This, in turn, leads us to its charm that will color the richness of our contemporary lives.

The Essence and Existence of the Charm of חסד in the Relationship between God and Humanity in the Book of Ruth

The Book of Ruth takes us on a journey that reveals the essence of חסד in the relationship between God and humanity. The main message implied in this book is that God's faithful love (חסד) is not limited to one group of people or one nation but encompasses all of His creation. This becomes evident through the character of Ruth, a Moabite woman, who becomes involved in God's universal salvation journey (Schreiner, 2013). Through God's actions, Ruth is chosen to play a significant role in the history of salvation, becoming part of the lineage that leads to King David and, ultimately, Jesus Christ (Wenham et al., 1994). The Book of Ruth reminds us that God accepts everyone who believes in Him, regardless of their origin or status, and His faithful love reaches all nations.

The Book of Ruth also portrays the existence of חסד in human-to-human and human-to-God relationships. God's faithful love (חסד) is reflected in His providence for people in difficult situations. Amidst famine and poverty, God is present in the daily lives of the families of Elimelech, Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz, ensuring their needs are met and bestowing blessings upon them. This demonstrates that God cares about human life and is always by their side, providing guidance and protection (Gaebelein, 1992). In the existence of this faithful love or mercy (חסד), humans feel the deep love of God, strengthening their faith and relationship with Him (Block, 1999).

Furthermore, the Book of Ruth also depicts the charm of חסד in human relationships. This is reflected through the characters of Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz. Ruth demonstrates exceptional commitment and loyalty to Naomi, even in difficult situations. She chooses to stay with Naomi and follow the God of Israel, revealing deep love and devotion. Boaz, despite having a much higher social status than Ruth, shows faithful love by treating her well, providing her with food, and ultimately marrying her for a greater purpose. This is a tangible example of faithful love among humans that is pleasing to God.

As we reflect on the meaning of חסד in the Book of Ruth, we can contemplate how the charm of this faithful love is relevant in our daily lives. The message of the universality and inclusivity of חסד teaches us to view each individual with compassion, regardless of background or social status. It prompts us to help fellow humans, provide support, and be a support to them, just like Boaz in this book. The charm of חסד motivates us to live a life that reflects the values of faithful love, both in our relationship with God and in our relationships with fellow humans (Mawikere & Hura, 2022;

Oswald, 2009). The Book of Ruth inspires us to celebrate and savor the charm of *ḥesed* in our daily lives.

The charm of *ḥesed* in the Book of Ruth has deep dimensions in human relationships, relationships with God, and relationships among humans. The book depicts God's inclusive faithful love, accepting all who believe in Him and caring for human life (Bruce, 2008; Carson, 2015). The charm of *ḥesed* is also reflected in human relationships, as shown by the characters of Ruth and Boaz, who exhibit commitment, loyalty, and affection. The Book of Ruth reminds us to live a life that reflects these values of faithful love, celebrating God's boundless love, and helping fellow humans.

Understanding Jesus Christ as the Supreme Manifestation of *ḥesed* and Its Implications in Everyday Life

The Book of Ruth intricately weaves the narrative of Boaz and Ruth, vividly illustrating the essence of *ḥesed* in human relationships. *ḥesed*, or steadfast love, extends beyond religious observance; it embodies a profound relational dynamic that finds its ultimate expression in Jesus Christ. Jesus epitomizes unwavering love, compassion, and loyalty toward humanity (Gaebelein, 1992), serving as a transformative paradigm for understanding and embodying *ḥesed* in our lives.

Jesus Christ's ministry reflects the depth and breadth of *ḥesed* in the divine-human relationship. Through His teachings and interactions, Jesus exemplifies the inclusive and transformative nature of steadfast love. His embrace of the marginalized underscores the radical inclusivity inherent in *ḥesed* (Card, 2017). Jesus's unwavering commitment to reconciliation, justice, and compassion transcends societal barriers, inviting all humanity to partake in the boundless grace of God's love.

Moreover, Jesus's sacrificial death and triumphant resurrection epitomize the pinnacle of *ḥesed* in action. Through His atoning sacrifice, Jesus extends forgiveness, redemption, and eternal life to all who believe in Him (Gaebelein, 1992). His resurrection heralds the victory of love over death, offering hope and assurance to those who are broken and downtrodden (Block, 1999). In Christ's resurrection, we witness the transformative power of *ḥesed* to overcome sin, reconcile humanity with God, and usher in a new creation characterized by love, justice, and peace.

As followers of Jesus Christ, we are called to emulate His example of steadfast love and compassion in our lives. By embodying the principles of *ḥesed* in our relationships, actions, and attitudes, we become conduits of God's grace and agents of reconciliation in a broken world (Card, 2017). Through acts of kindness and mercy, we bear witness to the transformative power of *ḥesed* to heal, restore, and uplift humanity.

In everyday life, *ḥesed* calls us to emulate the love and compassion demonstrated by Jesus Christ. It transcends religious rituals, permeating our interactions with others and shaping the fabric of our communities (Card, 2017). Practicing *ḥesed* involves

tangible acts of kindness, empathy, and selflessness towards both kin and strangers alike (Block, 1999). By embracing *ḥesed* as a guiding principle, we cultivate deeper connections, foster mutual respect, and contribute to the flourishing of human dignity in our society.

Moreover, loyalty to kin and fidelity to cultural customs emerge as integral facets of *ḥesed* in everyday life. Just as Boaz demonstrated loyalty to his family and adherence to societal norms in his interactions with Ruth, we are called to honour our familial ties and respect cultural traditions (Gaebelein, 1992). Loyalty to kin fosters cohesion within families, while fidelity to cultural customs preserves heritage and nurtures communal identity (Block, 1999).

Furthermore, the application of *ḥesed* in our lives extends beyond individual acts of kindness to encompass broader social implications. As we embody the principles of love and loyalty in our interactions, we contribute to the creation of inclusive and harmonious communities (Card, 2017). Through our commitment to *ḥesed*, we foster an environment where every individual is valued, respected, and supported, irrespective of their background or circumstances.

In conclusion, the profound significance of *ḥesed* lies not only in its manifestations but also in its capacity to shape the moral fabric of society. By embracing *ḥesed* as a guiding principle, we participate in the ongoing work of reconciliation, healing, and renewal initiated by Jesus Christ. As we strive to embody the transformative power of *ḥesed* in our daily lives, may we become vessels of God's love and agents of positive change in the world. Through our collective efforts to practice *ḥesed* and extend radical hospitality to all, we participate in the realization of God's kingdom on earth, where love reigns supreme, and all are welcomed as beloved children of God.

This article intricately examines how *ḥesed*, as portrayed in the Book of Ruth, transcends mere religious observance, embodying a profound relational dynamic ultimately exemplified by Jesus Christ. The narrative underscores Jesus's role as the epitome of unwavering love, compassion, and loyalty towards humanity, serving as a transformative paradigm for understanding and embodying *ḥesed* in our daily lives. Through His teachings, interactions, sacrificial death, and triumphant resurrection, Jesus embodies the inclusive and transformative nature of steadfast love, offering forgiveness, redemption, and eternal life to all who believe in Him. As followers of Jesus, we are called to emulate His example of *ḥesed* in our relationships, actions, and attitudes, becoming conduits of God's grace and agents of reconciliation in a broken world. This article asserts that practicing *ḥesed* involves tangible acts of kindness, empathy, loyalty, and fidelity to both kin and cultural customs, fostering inclusive and harmonious communities where every individual is valued, respected, and supported. Ultimately, the embrace of *ḥesed* as a guiding principle empowers us to participate in the ongoing work of reconciliation, healing, and renewal initiated by Jesus Christ, contributing to the

realization of God's kingdom on earth where love reigns supreme. This serves as the novelty arising from the findings of this research, upholding Grace Unveiled originating from Jesus Christ and channelled to and through Christians.

CONCLUSION

As extensively discussed above regarding the essence and existence of the charm of רַחֲמִים in human and divine relationships in the Book of Ruth in an inspiring manner. The Book of Ruth serves as a powerful inspiration in affirming the message of God's unwavering steadfast love (רַחֲמִים). God is always faithful to His covenant and loves all of humanity without regard to the social differences created by humans. The Book of Ruth reflects how God is present in every aspect of human life, from basic needs to family relationships.

The message of God's steadfast love (רַחֲמִים) in the Book of Ruth should be a motivation for humans to love God and fellow humans sincerely. As believers, we are reminded to be "supporters" of the lives of fellow human beings, especially those in poverty and marginalization. This message teaches us to uplift the dignity of every individual, regardless of the social differences that often create divisions among people.

Through the story of the steadfast love (רַחֲמִים) between Boaz and Ruth in the Book of Ruth, we can also understand its relevance in the context of the New Testament. The work of Jesus Christ establishes a new relationship within an inclusive community, overlooking differences such as nationality, social status, or gender. The Book of Ruth serves as a reflection of the noble values of the Kingdom of God that manifest through the work and person of Jesus Christ.

The Gospel of John asserts that we all receive grace ($\chi\acute{\alpha}\rho\iota\varsigma$ – *kharis* = רַחֲמִים – *Hesed*) upon grace through Jesus Christ (1:17). Therefore, as a church, we have the responsibility to manifest the signs of this Kingdom of God so that many can find a "resting place" in the faithful love of God. The Book of Ruth serves as a valuable lesson for us, reminding us that God's faithful love is always relevant in every aspect of our lives, and we are invited to be a reflection of this faithful love in our relationships with God and fellow human beings. Thus, as an implication of this study, it calls every Christian to live in love and faithfulness towards one another, especially in intimate fellowship with God in Jesus Christ, who has bestowed upon us such captivating grace ($\chi\acute{\alpha}\rho\iota\varsigma$ – *kharis* = רַחֲמִים – *Hesed*).

In conclusion, the charm of רַחֲמִים depicted in the Book of Ruth resonates profoundly in both human and divine relationships, affirming God's unwavering steadfast love. This divine love transcends social barriers, emphasizing the inherent value of every individual. As believers, we are called to emulate this love by supporting and uplifting the marginalized, thereby reflecting the inclusive nature of God's Kingdom. The narrative of Ruth and Boaz underscores the relevance of רַחֲמִים in the New

Testament, illustrating Jesus Christ's establishment of an inclusive community founded on love. Just as the Gospel of John highlights the abundance of grace (*χάρις* – *kharis* = *ἡσέδ* – *Hesed*) through Christ, we, as the Church, are tasked with embodying the Kingdom's values to extend God's faithful love to others. This study underscores the imperative for Christians to live in love and faithfulness, fostering intimate fellowship with God and manifesting His captivating grace in all our relationships. Thus, the Book of Ruth serves as a timeless reminder of God's enduring love and our call to mirror this love in our daily lives.

REFERENCES

- Adamczewski, B. (2023). The Purpose of the Book of Ruth. *Collectanea Theologica*, 93(2), 5–36. <https://doi.org/10.21697/ct.2023.93.2.01>
- Atkinson, D. (2000). *The Message of Ruth*. Intervarsity Press.
- Bergant, D., & Karris, R. J. (2002). *Tafsir Alkitab Perjanjian Lama*. Penerbit Kanisius.
- Block, D. I. (1999). *The New American Commentary An Exegetical and Theological Expositional of Holy Scripture: Judges, Ruth*. Broadman & Holman Publishers.
- Bruce, F. . (2008). *Zondervan Bible Commentary*. Zondervan.
- Card, M. (2017). *Hesed And The Mystery of God's Loving Kindness*. Intervarsity Press.
- Carson, D. A. (2015). *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*. Zondervan.
- Chapman, C. R. (2023). The Field Belonging to Boaz: Creating Kinship through Land, Labor, Food, and Feeding. *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 142(3), 431–450. <https://doi.org/10.15699/jbl.1423.2023.4>
- Darmawijaya, S. (2009). *Seluk Beluk Kitab Suci*. Penerbit Kanisius.
- De Waard, J., & Nida, E. A. (1992). *A Handbook on the Book of Ruth* (2nd ed.). Amer Bible Society.
- Fischer, J. A. (2002). *Tafsir Alkitab Perjanjian Lama* (D. Bergant & R. J. Karris (Eds.)). Kanisius.
- Gaebelein, F. E. (1992). *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 & 2 Samuel*. Zondervan.
- Gilbert, M., Johnson, A. R., & Lewis, P. W. (2018). *Missiological Research* (M. Gilbert, A. R. Johnson, & P. W. Lewis (Eds.)). William Carey Publishing.
- Glueck, N. (1967). *Hesed in The Bible*. Wipf and Stock.
- Groenen, C. (1992). *Pengantar Ke Dalam Perjanjian Lama*. Penerbit Kanisius.
- Guthrie, D., Motyer, J. A., Stibbs, A. M., & Wiseman, D. J. (Eds.). (1970). *The New Bible commentary*. Inter-Variety Press.
- Hill, A. E., & Walton, J. H. (2009). *A Survey of the Old Testament*. Zondervan Academic.
- Hillebrecht, M. (2012). *Chesed: Beyond the Vail of Mercy*. Charis Academy Publishing.
- Howard Jr, D. M. (2007). *An Introduction to the Old Testament Historical Books*.

- Moody Publishers.
- Hubbard, D. A., Lasor, W. S., & Bush, F. W. (2014). *Pengantar Perjanjian Lama 1: Taurat dan Sejarah*. BPK Gunung Mulia.
- Hubbard Jr., R. L. (1988). *The Book of Ruth: New International Commentary on the Old Testament*. Eerdmans.
- Kapojos, S. M., & Wijaya, H. (2018). Perwujudan Kasih Setia Allah Terhadap Kesetiaan Rut. *Evangelikal: Jurnal Teologi Injili Dan Pembinaan Warga Jemaat*, 2(2), 99–104. <https://doi.org/10.46445/ejti.v2i2.107>
- Karman, Y. (2009). *Tafsiran Alkitab Kitab Rut*. BPK Gunung Mulia.
- Karman, Y. (2013). *Bunga Rampai Teologi Perjanjian Lama*. BPK Gunung Mulia.
- Kelman, S. (2013). *Chesed Shel Emet: The Truest Act of Kindness*. EKS Publishing.
- Kugler, G., & Magori, O. (2023). Hesed in Ruth: A Frail Moral Tool in an Inflexible Social Structure. *Religions*, 14(5), 604. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14050604>
- Longman III, T. (2015). *A Commentary on the Book of Ruth*. Baker Academic.
- Ludji, B. (2009). *Pemahaman Dasar Perjanjian Lama 1*. Bina Media Informasi.
- Magness, J., & Gitin, S. (1998). *Hesed Ve-Emet*. Scholar Press.
- Margaret, C. (2019). Pendekatan Interpretasi Teologis Kitab Suci dan Prasuposisi-Prasuposisi Teologis di Baliknnya. *Veritas: Jurnal Teologi Dan Pelayanan*, 18(2), 141–160. <https://doi.org/10.36421/veritas.v18i2.330>
- Mawikere, M. C. S., & Hura, S. (2022). Desain-Gambar Besar Allah Atas Alur Kehidupan dan Supremasi Kasih Setianya “Diskursus Tafsir Naratif Rut 2-4”. *DIDASKO: Jurnal Teologi Dan Pendidikan Kristen*, 2(1), 34–52. <https://doi.org/10.52879/didasko.v2i1.45>
- Moraff, J. F. (2023). “Children of the Prophets and the Covenant”: A Post-Supersessionist Reading of Luke-Acts. *Religions*, 14(1), 120. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14010120>
- Murphy, C. (2020). Religion & Transitional Justice. *Daedalus*, 149(3), 185–200. https://doi.org/10.1162/daed_a_01811
- Oswald, J. (2009). *Hesed: Endrung, Eternal, Underserved Love*. Zondervan.
- Sakenfeld, K. D. (1978). *The Meaning of Hesed in The Hebrew Bible: A New Inquiry*. Wipf and Stock.
- Santoso, A. (2011). *Tafsir Kitab Rut – Di Bawah Perlindungan Sayap-Nya*. Bina Media Informasi.
- Satterthwaite, P., & McConville, G. (2007). *Exploring The Old Testament Volume 2*. Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.
- Scheunemann, R. (2011). *Pengantar Perjanjian Lama*. Sekolah Alkitab Malam Gereja Kristen Injili di Tanah Papua.
- Scholtz, J. J. (2017). Israelologie: ’n Bybels-teologiese perspektief oor Israel se verlede, hede en toekoms. *In Die Skriflig/In Luce Verbi*, 51(1).

- <https://doi.org/10.4102/ids.v51i1.2231>
- Schreiner, T. R. (2013). *The King in His Beauty: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments*. Baker Publishing Group.
- Stahlberg, L. C. (2008). Modern Day Moabites: The Bible and the Debate About Same-Sex Marriage. *Biblical Interpretation*, 16(5), 442–475. <https://doi.org/10.1163/156851508X329683>
- Thambyrajah, J. A. (2021). Israelite or Moabite? Ethnicity in the book of Ruth. *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, 46(1), 44–63. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0309089220980486>
- Tjhin, S., & Dendeng, L. C. (2022). The Evolution of Israel’s Religion from Abraham to Pre-Exilic and Its Significance for Christians. *Khazanah Theologia*, 4(3), 189–198. <https://doi.org/10.15575/kt.v4i3.12251>
- Umeanolue, I. L. (2022). Religious differences and intermarriage in Ruth: lessons for Nigerian Christians. *Journal of Religion and Human Relations*, 14(1), 131–149. <https://doi.org/10.4314/jrhr.v14i1.7>
- Wenham, G. J., Motyer, J. ., Carson, D. A., & France, R. T. (1994). *New Bible Commentary (21 st Century Edition)*. Intervarsity Press.
- Zuck, R. B., Merrill, E., Constable, T., Heater Jr, H., & Bock, D. L. (2005). *A Biblical Theology of the Old Testament*. Moody Press.