

Book of Ruth

Cultural Background Dictionary

Amah: Hebrew word meaning “slave, maid and concubine.” This is how Ruth offers herself in marriage to Boaz (3:9) as a female slave, subordinate to Boaz not as a social equal. “Slave wives” were not uncommon in the Ancient Near East. Ruth seeks marriage, but stresses “her utter dependence on Boaz’s favor to grant her request.” (New International Dictionary of OT Theology and Exegesis)

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Gibbor hayil – Term used to describe Boaz in Ruth 3:1. This term is often used of brave and valiant soldiers, but here it does not carry a military meaning. It emphasizes Boaz’s outstanding character. He communicates that Boaz is a prominent, capable, good, worthy, brave and noble man. It may also carry the implication that Boaz is prosperous, a successful businessman with resources to help the needy.

Goel: The Hebrew word *goel* (Ruth 3:9) translated “close relative,” (NASB), “Kinsman-redeemer,” (NIV) or “near kinsman” (KJV) identifies the person as having obligation to help a deceased man’s family. In the book of Ruth it identifies Boaz as being “under obligation to help the widows.” As Goel, Boaz bought the land of Elimelech and married Ruth. The marriage served to “restore the unity of descendants and ancestral property” and thus fulfill his duty to the “care of elderly relatives in their old age.” (New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis)

Hesed: Found in Ruth 1:8, 2:20, 3:10 this Hebrew word is often translated as “lovingkindness,” “love” or “mercy.” It reflects the “kindness of men toward men, in doing favors and benefits,” as well as the kindness of God caring for Israel. It often occurs in the context of covenant obligations or family loyalty. (BDB)

Isha: (Ruth 4:10) - Most common Hebrew word for “wife.” An honored position and source of blessing in Israel. The classic picture of the ideal wife is set forth in Proverbs 31:10-31. (TWOT)

Levirate Marriage: Levirate laws maintained the name of the deceased man through his male heirs. If a man died without a son, his brother had to take the widow as a wife to produce a male heir for his deceased brother (Deut 25:5–6). (Guenther Haaz, *JETS*, 1995, Vol. 38, p323). However, “marriage to a relative’s widow” (such as Ruth) is never presented in the OT “as part of the redeemer’s duty.” Boaz was not a “brother” or even an Uncle, and therefore, the law did not obligate Boaz to marry Ruth. (New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis)

Names in the Bible: “In contemporary Western culture a name rarely possesses significance beyond that of a highly sentimental, perhaps aesthetically conditioned response on the part of proud, doting parents to the intoxicating joy of a new arrival. Not so in the Bible. There a human name typically reflects character and mission anticipated in life, which may turn out for either good or ill. It may embody the spiritual vision of parents for their child’s future. In other instances, it is prophetic of future outcomes or events.” (Theological Dictionary of the Bible, p. 550)

Threshing floor: Threshing Floors were nothing more than level places of smooth rock or pounded earth located on a hill, where the grain could be separated from the chaff by tossing the threshed grain into the wind that rose in the evening from the Mediterranean. (EBC)

Time of Judges: “The time between Joshua’s death (Judges 1:1) and the coronation of Saul (1 Samuel 10) – an era of frightful social and religious chaos. The book of judges is teems with violent invasions, apostate religion, unchecked lawlessness, and tribal civil war.” (Hubbard, *Ruth*, p. 84)