

WORD STUDY

Hesed, Chesed, Checed, Lovingkindness

OBST 590 LUO (Summer 2011)

Old Testament Introduction

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I. Introduction

At first glance hesed/lovingkindness, further referred to as hesed, means 'mercy' or 'forgiveness'. Additional extensive study shows that in other verses the word hesed could possibly be defined as simply 'kindness' or even 'good'. The multiple ways to define this word cause a conundrum which proves that the word must be looked at in its context.

II. Context of Hesed

In both passages in Genesis (Genesis 19:19 and Genesis 39:21) hesed refers to mercy where the God had shown favor on Lot and Joseph. In Lot's case (Genesis 19:19) hesed appears to lean toward the meaning of grace where God allowed him to leave instead of perishing. In Joseph's instance (Genesis 39:21) the Lord kept Joseph from being killed, tortured and the like since he was thrown into prison for a crime he was falsely accused of and God showed hesed to him.

Exodus 20:6 also uses hesed as mercy stated simply, but one might imply that it could also be defined as forgiveness. Loosely used as forgiveness the Lord talks about being a jealous God and if there are other gods before Him there will be punishment to further generations, but to those who love Him He will show mercy/forgiveness.

Joshua 2:12 speaks of the harlot, Rahab, who hides the two spies and asks them to show hesed on her since she showed hesed on them. In this verse hesed is shown to denote

understanding and mercy in its rawest sense.

When discovering hesed in its context of 1 Samuel 20:14-15 both use hesed in the form of kindness. Jonathan talks with David to express his allegiance and his love for David.

Jonathan asks for David to show him hesed so that he may continue to serve David. Jonathan speaks of showing kindness and mercy with his use of hesed.

2 Samuel 7:15 is God speaking of His hesed, and in this scripture He is using it as mercy. God tells David that his offspring will not lose God's mercy. In this verse hesed might possibly mean God's Spirit, again this is a possibility not a definitive statement so that it is not taken as blasphemy. But it appears that in this context hesed could possibly mean that God would not take away his mercy/hesed/Spirit.

David's praise, in 1 Chronicles 16:34, ends with David giving thanks to the Lord and stating that His mercy endures forever. Hesed here is transliterated as mercy, but could mean love, grace, and lovingkindness, which in this scripture, David says it will last forever.

Hesed in Nehemiah 13:14 is used in one of the most unusual ways. It is used where Nehemiah asks God to remember him and to not wipe out his good (hesed) deeds. This version of hesed appears to mean something quite insignificant in this scripture. But, without wanting to make a fallacy when God created the earth He stated it was good, but this word in that scripture means pleasant. So in Nehemiah it appears that hesed means simply good.

Psalm 25:6-7 show that hesed can be transliterated in two different ways even though it is the same Hebrew word. In the first verse it is described as lovingkindness where David asks the Lord to remember His lovingkindness/hesed. Now in the second verse David asks God to remember in his mercy/hesed to remember him. In these instances they are both interchangeable where hesed could actually be lovingkindness and/or mercy.

Psalm 33 talks about God in His role of creation and verse 5 states the earth is full of the hesed of the Lord. Verse 22 talks about letting the author and reader to have their mercy/hesed in the Lord. Goodness and mercy used in these verses are compatible, but are used differently. The first verse expresses God's goodness and the second verse is man's appeal to God's mercy.

In verse 5 of Psalm 36 hesed is stated as God's mercy which reaches to the heavens and appears to be something that is immeasurable by human means. Yet in verses 7 and 10 of Psalm 36 speak of God's lovingkindness and how sweet it is to have this coming from a Creator. This form of hesed is almost indescribable from the context of the psalmist and how pure this feeling/emotion is from God.

Hesed could be interpreted possibly in a few ways and maybe in Psalm 40:10-11 it might be translated as patience. Without trying to make hesed mean something it is not by definition, but in these two verses David asks for God's hesed to continually preserve him and how it is something God does not conceal. Patience might just be thought of in place of hesed.

Psalm 59:16-17 speaks of hesed as mercy, but David approaches this style of mercy to God as a thing to be thankful for even though death was at his doorstep. This type of mercy is one of pure abandon and realizing God is sovereign.

The psalmist in 85:7 and 85:10 express hesed again in mercy, but here it appears that it relates to a salvation type of mercy similar of the Messiah. In verse 10 the psalmist states hesed along with truth intimating that the two are so similar they might possibly be interchangeable. This connotation is also very true of Psalm 86 verses 13 and 15. These verses denote hesed as mercy, but again allow truth to follow directly behind in verse 15. The psalmist describes God to have hesed or mercy, grace, and compassion.

Psalm 89:1-2 only further what has been stated in the above four verses about how hesed refers to mercy; however, the psalmist in these verses states he will sing of the Lord's hesed and that hesed shall be built up forever alluding to something almost concrete in form in lieu of the more emotional responses prior to this chapter. God's hesed is so strong that it is to be built up and last forever because of God's faithfulness to His creation.

In Proverbs 11:17 hesed refers to a man not God's merciful ways. It does give the hint that a merciful/hesed man will profit his soul, which leads us to believe that hesed may still signify the type of mercy that God would show to His beloved people.

Who can argue with the form of hesed in Proverbs 21:21? This form of hesed expresses

to the reader the man which follows righteousness and hesed will find life. If a Christian is to show Christ-likeness and Christ is God in human form and God is merciful/hesed then hesed must mean mercy here.

Isaiah 54:10 speaks of God's promise of not flooding the earth again and how He will have hesed on his people. Hesed is a descriptive word of the Lord in this verse speaking about God's character.

In Isaiah 57:1 hesed men are mistreated even though they have shown righteousness. This form of hesed is a simple descriptive adjective to good men which are being persecuted for no apparent reason other than the Lord allowing them to endure.

III. Conclusion

The word hesed runs the gambit of definitions or transliterations, but comes up similar to all as a descriptive style adjective which describes either God or someone's personality. Each area in which the term hesed is stated shows that it mostly refers to mercy which speaks of God's character and His ever-slow wrath and constant forgiveness. Hesed may be translated lovingkindness, mercy, good, or even merciful, but its full meaning is something much deeper when describing the Lord. Each verse has a significant purpose for the use of hesed, but ultimately it appears that it is a word meaning a pardon from God's judgment.