

Chesed in the Bible

Week One: The Etymology of the Word Chesed

1. Why *chesed* and not *hesed*?
 - a. Julia was correct to put a dot under the H
 - b. Hebrew *heth* v. *he*
 - c. My laptop does not have a dot to put under the H
 - d. The "Ch" is pronounced as in German (Achtung) or Scottish, a throat clearing noise, not as the "ch" in "chair."
 - e. If no English version is listed after a verse (e.g. KJV, RSV, etc), that means the translation is my own.

2. The Root *CH-S-D*
 - a. In the Hebrew Bible
 - b. In Aramaic
 - c. In Syriac
 - d. In Arabic
 - e. In Urdu

3. The masculine noun *chesed* appears 247 times in the Hebrew bible
 - a. Opposite meanings – “contronyms” (left: I was the only person left in the room; vs. I just left the room and am outside now; dust: I use this cloth to dust the shelf; I am dusting the omlette with light cheese)
 - i. 245 times positive meaning “goodness, mercy, kindness, faithful, etc”
 - ii. 2 times negative meaning “shame or reproach”
 1. Leviticus 20:17
 - a. “If a man marries his sister, the daughter of either his father or his mother, and they have sexual relations, it is a shameful disgrace (*chesed*)”
 2. Proverbs 14:34
 - a. “Righteousness exalteth a nation; but sin is a reproach (*chesed*) to any people”

4. The feminine noun *chasiydah* appears 6 times
 - a. Usually translated “stork” [because a stork is kind and affectionate to its young, per BDB]
 - b. Tradition is that a stork brought good luck to a house or nation
5. The adjective *chasiyd* appears 35 times
6. There are two proper nouns with combined-*chesed* forms, both in I Chronicles 3:20 and both sons of Zerubbabel
 - a. Name of Hassadiah (“Yah(weh) is kind”)
 - b. Name of Jushab-chesed (“Kindness will be restored”)
7. There are two contronym verbs in the Hebrew bible from the root *ch-s-d* with opposite meanings
 - a. 2 Sam 22:26 and Psalm 18:26 with the meaning “be good, be kind”
 - i. Also “to be merciful,” “to be pious,” or “to be good”
 - b. Proverbs 25:10 this verb only appears once
 - i. “To be reproached or ashamed”
 - ii. KJV – “Lest he that heareth it put you to shame...”
 - iii. NIV – “or the one who hears it may shame you ...”
 - iv. NLT – “Others may accuse you of gossip...”
 - v. MSG – “Word is sure to get around and no one will trust you...”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- **Have you noticed “stedfast love” in Scripture before today?**
 - **If so, what did it mean to you?**
- **Can you think of any “contronyms”?**
- **What is the difference to you between these four meanings of *chesed*:**
 - **goodness**
 - **mercy**
 - **kindness**
 - **faithful**

Week Two: Ancient and Modern Translations of the Word *Chesed*

8. The “kindness” idea of the root of *chesed* in the OT leads to
 - a. Mercy or Grace when used of God
 - b. Piety or love when used of man
9. Ancient Translations of *chesed*

- a. The LXX –what and when? The 70 days, myth or truth? 3rd to 1st century BC, dates uncertain
 - i. 12 different Greek words used by LXX to translate *chesed*
 - ii. However the word *eleos* is the favorite, used 214 times
 - iii. And *eleos* derivatives are used 13 more times
 - iv. *Eleos*
 1. Plato in *The Republic* meaning “pity for”
 2. Ancient Greek god of mercy was named Eleus
 3. Stoics said *eleos* was a sickness of the soul since it “involved emotions”, the opposite of *orge* which means anger
 4. The LXX uses *eleos* for pity, compassion, or mercy when used of God to man and man to man; and passionate love when used of man to God.
 - v. *Kharis, Elpis, and Dikaiosune*
 1. These words are each used twice for *chesed*
 2. Famous Greek words meaning Grace, Hope, and Righteousness
 - vi. *Doxa* used once – interesting and controversial text Isaiah 40:6
 1. “All flesh is grass and all its *chesed* is like a flower of the field”
 2. LXX has “All flesh is grass (fodder) and all the glory/splendor (*doxa*) of man is like the flower of grass.”
 3. KJV – “The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the goodness thereof is as the flower of the field.”
 4. NLT – “...Shout that people are like the grass. Their beauty fades as quickly as the flowers in a field.”
 5. NIV – “...All people are like grass, and all their faithfulness is like the flowers of the field.”
 6. NASB1955 – “...All flesh is grass, and all its loveliness is like the flower of the field.’
 7. MSG – “...These people are nothing but grass, their love fragile as wildflowers.”
- b. The Greek NT translations of *chesed* in OT quotes; 1st to 2nd Century AD (or BCE)—all *eleos* except the James passage
 - i. Nine times we see how the NT writers viewed *chesed*
 - ii. Matthew 9:10-13 – Jesus quotes Hosea 6:6 which says “For I (Yahweh) desired (delighted in) *chesed* and not sacrifice” =

- iii. Matthew 23:23 – Jesus quoting Hosea 6:8 “He hath shown thee, O man, what is good and what Yahweh requires of you, do justice, love *chesed*, and walk humbly with your God.”
- iv. Luke 1:50 – Jesus’ mother quotes Psalm 103:17 when she breaks forth into joy and thankfulness “The *chesed* of Yahweh is from everlasting unto everlasting to the ones who fear Him.”
- v. James 5:11 – referring to God’s self-manifestation in Exodus 34:6 James says, “You have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord, how that the Lord is full of pity (*polusplanxva* = much bowels of compassion) and merciful (*chesed* = *oiktirmon* = merciful).”
- c. The Latin Vulgate – ca. 383 A.D. translated by Jerome both OT and NT
 - i. The usual Latin translation of *chesed* is *miser cordia* which means “tender-heartedness, pity, compassion, and mercy.”
 - ii. My conclusion of the Vulgate’s handling of *chesed* –
 - 1. *Chesed* meant ‘heart-felt mercy motivated by man’s wretched and pitiful condition’

10. Modern Translations of *Chesed*

- a. Get ready for a roller coaster ride with how moderns have handled *chesed*
- b. Three scholars became famous for their unique translations
 - i. Coverdale = lovingkindness
 - ii. Cheyne = duteous love
 - iii. George Adam Smith = leal love (from 14th century middle English meaning “loyal or true”)
- c. The following gleaned from nine English translations show how those three scholars have not come close to satisfying our need to understand this amazing word:
 - i. Kindness, kind, grace, graciousness, being spared, friendly, favor, affection, love, merciful, deeds of piety, pious deed, goodness, mercy, pity, kindness, generous, to be strong, loving, lovingly intervene, one’s own good, devout, gentleness, beauty, tenderness, goodwill, merciful kindness, goodness and excellent ways, truth, peace, my Holy One, the innocent, keep faith, steadfast love, ever constant, loyal service, loyalty, men to be trusted, faithfully, good faith, righteousness, enduring love, unchanging love, help, mutual trust, unfailing devotion, benefit, kind promises, and a great boon!!!!!!

- ii. If you were paying attention you saw (amazingly) that the NOUN *chesed* was translated as an adjective and even as a verb!
- d. The Geneva Bible (1560)
 - i. 171 times “mercie”
 - ii. 26 time “louing kindness” (only in the Psalms)
 - iii. 16 times “kindness”
 - iv. 8 times “goodness”
 - v. 7 times “merciful”
 - vi. 4 times “fauour”
 - vii. 3 times “grace”
- e. King James Version (1611)
 - i. 149 times “mercy”
 - ii. 36 times “kindness”
 - iii. 31 times “Loving kindness”
 - iv. 12 times “goodness”
 - v. 5 times the adjective “kindly”
 - vi. 2 times “merciful”
 - vii. 1 time “merciful kindness”
- f. The Emphasized Bible (1897) the only Restoration Movement scholar (Joseph Bryant Rotherham) to ever offer an entire Bible translation
 - i. 242 times “loving kindness”
 - ii. The remaining 5 – kind, grace, loveliness, mercy, goodness
- g. Young’s Literal Translation of the Holy Bible (1898)
 - i. 221 times “kindness”
 - ii. 14 times “kind acts”
 - iii. 3 time “lovingkindness”
 - iv. 2 times “mercy”
 - v. Some oddities of his literalness: Job 6:14 he has “shame” and Isaiah 40:6 he has “goodliness is as the flower of the field”
- h. American Standard Version (1901)
 - i. 177 times “lovingkindness”
 - ii. 40 times “kindness”
 - iii. 8 times “mercy”
 - iv. 8 times “kindly”
 - v. 3 times “merciful”
 - vi. 3 times “goodness”
 - vii. 1 time “goodliness”
 - viii. Note the three occurrences of *chesed* in Ruth where others see “favor” in *chesed* the ASV sees only “kindness” (way too weak for me!)

- i. Moffatt's Bible (1922) – very popular, in 1946 appeared the 96th reprint of this translation
 - i. He plays with the text too much, transposes Genesis 2:4a and puts it ahead of Genesis 1:1
 - ii. 90 times “kindness”
 - iii. 61 times “love” (nobody had ever translated *chesed* with love before! 45 of these are in the Psalms speaking of God's *chesed*)
 - 1. Exodus 34:6 “Yahweh is abundant in love)
 - iv. Interestingly he never uses “loving kindness” even though he used love and kindness 151 times!!
 - v. 34 times “be kind”
 - vi. 9 times “kindly”
 - vii. 3 times “mercy”
- j. Revised Standard Version (1952)
 - i. 180 times “stedfast love”
 - ii. RSV abandons totally “lovingkindness” and “mercy” is only found once – Psalm 23:6 “surely goodness and mercy (*chesed*) will follow me...”
 - iii. 24 times “kindness”
 - iv. The RSV introduces the concept of “loyalty” to *chesed*
 - 1. 13 times “loyalty”
 - 2. 5 time “loyally”
 - 3. 1 time “loyal love”
 - v. Where *chesed* appears twice in Proverbs 20:28 the RSV has “loyalty” for one and “righteousness” for the other!!!!
 - vi.in I Chronicles 19:2 the first with “stedfast love” and the second “loyally”
 - vii. Micah 6:8 “He has required you to love kindness”
 - viii. Stedfast love is ONLY used for the divine characteristic or for man toward God, never for man to man
- k. The Jerusalem Bible (1966)
 - i. 118 times “love”
 - ii. 59 times “kindness”
 - iii. 9 times “favour)
 - iv. 6 times “graciousness” (unique)
 - v. 5 times “goodness”
 - vi. 4 times “grace”
 - vii. Exodus 34:6 “kindness”
- l. The New English Bible (1970) –variety of scholars – hence no consistency for *chesed*

- i. New idea that *chesed* involves a bond between two parties which manifests in faithfulness
 - ii. 77 times “keep faith”
 - iii. 21 times “true love” all in the Psalms
 - iv. 16 times “loyalty
 - v. I Samuel 20:14 has David asking Jonathan to “show me faithful friendship”
 - vi. 8 times the novel phrase “constant friendship”, “Stedfast friend” is used once
 - vii. 6 times “ever constant”
 - viii. 3 times “unchanging love”
 - ix. I love *chesed* in Exodus 34:6 – “ever constant”
 - m. The New International Version (1973) – 90 scholars, again not consistent for *chesed*
 - i. Exodus 34:6 -- “love”
 - ii. Psalm 23:6 – “love”
 - iii. Isaiah 40:6 – “faithfulness”
 - n. New Language Translation (1996)
 - i. Exodus 34:6 – “unfailing love”
 - ii. Psalm 23:6 – “unfailing love”
 - iii. Isaiah 40:6 -- “beauty”
11. SAD’s favorite preferred translations of *chesed*
- a. God’s attribute: “stedfast love” “loyal lovingkindness” “covenantal love”
 - b. God’s *chesed* to man: “constant love” “covenant love” “faithful love”
 - c. Man’s *chesed* to God: “constant love”
 - d. Man’s *chesed* to man: “constant faithfulness” “covenantal lovingkindness” “constant love”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What is your reaction to learning that there are so many translations of the Hebrew word *chesed*?
- Can you think of any English words that have so many different meanings?
- After today have you chosen a favorite translation of *chesed*?
 - If so, what is it?

Week Three: The Chesed of Yahweh

12. An Aspect of God's Nature Specialty Stressed by Him in Exodus 34:6

- a. "And Yahweh (*'hwh*)* descended in the cloud, and stood with him [Moses] there, and proclaimed in [by/with] the name of Yahweh. And Yahweh passed by in front of his face; and he proclaimed: Yahweh Yahweh, God (*'el*), full of mercies and graciousness, long suffering, and [with] great *chesed* and truth. [I am] the one guarding/watching/keeping *chesed* to the thousands of generations, forgiving iniquity and sin and who will by no means (not at all) clear the iniquity of the fathers upon their sons, and upon their sons until the third and fourth (generations)."
- b. * the Tetragrammaton (four letters)—Exodus 3:13-14 -Moses says to God (in essence) okay so you want me to go speak to Pharaoh, but just who will I say has sent me? What is your name?
 - i. God tells Moses what His name is: The Great "I am Who I am" passage which means SO much more than that.
 - ii. No vowel points in MT, so it could be one of 3 verbal moods:
 1. Qal - I am
 2. Piel – I will do what I will do
 3. Hiphyl – I cause what I cause
- c. This self-description of God by God is the paramount message of the theophany; it colors all of the rest of the OT and indeed the NT too

13. Yahweh stresses *chesed* as one of His attributes 185 times in the OT

- a. He is abundant in *chesed* and he shows *chesed* to thousands, now and in the future; which means to us today
- b. This theophany description of God's *chesed* to Moses is repeated 7 times in the OT
 - i. Numbers 14:1-24
 - ii. Nehemiah 9:9-15
 - iii. Joel 2:12-13
 - iv. Jonah 4:2
 - v. Psalm 86:15
 - vi. Psalm 103:7
 - vii. Psalm 145:8

14. Yahweh's *chesed* and other divine attributes connected with *chesed*

- a. *Rahamim* tender, mercy, compassion, affection
 - i. In line 17 of the Moabite stone this word apparently refers to female slaves/captives.

- ii. Lamentations 3:22-23, and 32 (“Great is your faithfulness” passage!)
 - b. *Hen* unmerited acts of kindness/favor/grace
 - c. *‘ameth* truth, truthfulness
 - i. 15 times this phrase appears “*chesed* and *‘ameth*”
 - d. *Mishpat* judgment
 - i. Only Jeremiah 9:23 and Hosea 2:21
 - ii. *Mishpat* in the OT cannot be separated from Yahweh, it is His job to be the judge of the universe
 - e. *Tzedik* and *tzedakah* righteous and righteousness
 - i. Also only in Jeremiah 9:23 and Hosea 2:21
 - f. *Tov* pleasant, agreeable, or good
 - i. 14 passages join *chesed* with *tov*
15. The Eternity of God’s *chesed*
- a. 43 times *chesed* is associated with *‘aolam* forever
 - b. In Psalm 136 all 26 verses proclaim that “God’s *chesed* endures (is) forever”
16. *Chesed* as the Reciprocal Relationship between God and Individuals
- a. The Patriarchs—Genesis 24:12; 32:9-10 (Joseph, Jaacob, and Abraham)
 - i. Is “covenant love” too narrow?
 - ii. Is “loyal lovingkindness” better?
 - b. Two Righteous Women – Ruth and Orpah
 - i. Ruth 1:8
 - c. God’s Anointed Kings
 - i. 42 times *chesed* is reciprocal relationship between God and His anointed kings
 - ii. God took His *chesed* away from the disobedient Saul (2 Samuel 7:15)
 - d. Lot, Ezra, and Job
 - i. Lot – Genesis 19:18-20
 - ii. Ezra – Ezra 7:27-28
 - iii. Job – Job 10;12
17. *Chesed* between God and Specific Types of Individuals
- a. The One who Loves and Obeys Yahweh
 - i. Exodus 20:5-6 and Deuteronomy 5:9-10; and 7:9
 - b. The One who Trusts in Yahweh
 - i. Psalm 32:10
 - c. The One who Hopes in Yahweh
 - i. Psalm 32:32
 - d. The One who Knows Yahweh

- i. Psalm 36:11
 - e. The One who Calls Upon Yahweh
 - i. Psalm 86:5
 - f. The One who Walks Before Yahweh with the Whole Heart
 - i. 1 Kings 8:23 and 2 Chronicles 6:14
 - g. The One who Feels Yahweh
 - i. Psalm 103:11
18. *Chesed* as the Reciprocal Relationship between God and Groups of People
- a. During the exodus (Exodus 15:13)
 - b. From the Conquest to the time of Ezra (Psalm 136:17-24)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Share your reaction to God's self-description about *chesed* in Exodus 34:6
 - To the thousands of generations...that means us today right here in River City, oops I meant River Forest, right?
- What is your reaction to the conversation between God and Moses in Exodus 3:13-14 where God says "I am who I am", "I will be who I will be", and/or "I will cause what I cause"?
- What is your reaction learning that God took His *chesed* away from the disobedient Saul (2 Samuel 7:15)

Week Four: The Chesed of Man

19. In the Prophets
- a. There are 8 instances in the Prophets where *chesed* refers to a general characteristic of man
 - i. Isaiah 40:6 is the most famous: "The voice of one crying, Cry! And one said What shall I cry? All Flesh is grass and all its *chesed* is like a flower of the field."
 - ii. Micah 6:8 is the next most famous: "Yahweh has shown you O man, what is good and what Yahweh seeks from you: only the doing of justice and the loving of *chesed* and walking humbly with your God."
 - iii. Hosea 6:4 is powerful: "O Ephraim, what shall I do unto you? O Judah, what shall I do unto you? For your *chesed* is as a

morning cloud, and as the dew that goes away very early (in the day).”

- iv. Hosea 4:1 – “Yahweh has a controversy with the inhabitants of the land, because there is no truth, nor any *chesed*, nor knowledge of God in the land.”
- v. Hosea 12:7 – “Therefore, turn yourself to your God; keep *chesed* and justice, and wait for your God continually.”

20. In the Psalms and Proverbs

- a. Psalm 101:1 – “I will sing to You, O Lord, I will sing of *chesed* and justice.”
- b. Psalm 109:12, 18 – “may there not be for him one continuing *chesed*, and there not be one showing favor to his orphans; ... he remembered not to show *chesed* and he persecuted the afflicted man and the poor man.”

21. *Chesed* as a Reciprocal Relationship Among Humans

- a. *Chesed* between humans – not merely love, but loyal love; not merely kindness, but dependable kindness; not merely affection, but affection that has committed itself to both enduring faithfulness and unwavering commitment.
- b. In 34 OT instances once a reciprocal relationship had been established between two people, each was expected or hoping for reciprocal acts of *chesed* from the other
- c. Between two really good friends: David and Jonathan
 - i. I Samuel 20:8 – “Therefore show *chesed* with your servant, for you have brought your servant into a covenant with Yahweh.”
 - 1. David has established a “covenant of friendship” with Jonathan (I Samuel 18:1-4) and by virtue of that relationship, David feels confident to ask of Jonathan, “Show me your *chesed*.”
 - 2. When David appeals to Jonathan to treat him with *chesed* he has reason to believe that Jonathan will do so because Jonathan has so promised in a “covenant of Yahweh.”
 - 3. Hence, the “covenant” gives him reason to look for and depend upon *chesed*.
- d. Between a Man and a Woman
 - i. Genesis 20:13 – “Abraham said to Sarah, ‘This is your *chesed* which you can show it about me – in every place that we enter, say ‘my brother is he.’”

- ii. Ruth3:10 – Boaz says to Ruth, “Blessed be you by Yahweh, my daughter; you have made your latter *chesed* better than your former.”
- iii. Esther “found *chesed* in the eyes of” Hegai (2:9) and later in the eyes of the king (2:17).
- e. Between Two Righteous Women: Ruth and Orpah
 - i. Ruth 1:8 –Naomi says to Ruth and Orpah, her two Moabitish daughters-in-law (neither of whom were part of the chosen people of God’s covenant with the seed of Abraham): “Go! Return! Each woman to the house of [your] mother; may Yahweh show *chesed* to you, just as you did to the dead ones and to me.”
 - ii. Note: this display of *chesed* by the two women made them qualified in Naomi’s eyes to receive the *chesed* of Yahweh.

22. *Chesed* Between Two Friendly Tribes

- a. In Genesis 21:22b-23, the Philistine king Philcol had shown *chesed* to Abraham and now asks it in return: “God is with you in all that you do; now therefore swear unto me here by God that you will not deal falsely with me, not with my son, nor with my son’s son; but according to the *chesed* that I have done unto you, you shall do unto me, and to the land wherein you have sojourned.”
- b. I Samuel 15:6. – the Israelites and the Kenites
- c. 2 Samuel 10:2 – David says to the Amonites, “I will show *chesed* to Hanun, son of Nahash, like that *chesed* which his father showed to me.”

23. *Chesed* Between Two Fellow Prisoners

- a. In Genesis 40:14 Joseph while in prison interprets the dream of Pharaoh’s butler and then says to him, “Hold me in your memory when things are well with you, and show *chesed*, I pray thee, unto me, and make mention of me to Pharaoh, and bring me out of this prison.”
- b. This begs the question: how did the Egyptian butler know the Hebrew word *chesed*?
 - i. Was the root h-s-d known in Egyptian as it was in Urdu, also a non-semitic language?

24. Between Blood Relatives

- a. Genesis 47:29 – When the aging Jacob was facing death he called for his son Joseph and said, “If, I pray thee, I have found favor (*hen*) in your eyes, place I pray thee, your hand under my thigh, and show me *chesed* and truth; do not I pray thee bury me in Egypt.”

- b. Scholars have long noted that every son owed his father *chesed* (Nelson Gleuck, “Hesed”, The Hebrew Union Press, 1967, page 39).
25. Between Spies and a Helper
- a. Joshua 2:12-14 – Rahab the prostitute tells helps the spies sent by Joshua, and she tells him that she has heard how Yahweh dried up the water of the Red Sea, and then she says “I know that Yahweh has given you this land” – and the purpose of her words is seen next: “Now then, please swear to me by Yahweh that you will show *chesed* to my family, because I have shown *chesed* to you.”
 - b. Judges 1:24 – the Israelite spies see a man come out of the city and they speak privately to him: “Show us, we pray thee, the entrance to the city, and we will do *chesed* with you.”
26. Between a Leader and his Followers
- a. Gideon and Israel – Judges 8:35
 - b. Abner and the House of Saul – 2 Samuel 3:8
 - c. Hezekiah and Judah – 2 Chronicles 32:32 (his many acts of *chesed*)
 - d. Josiah and Judah – 2 Chronicles 35:26 (his many acts of *chesed*)
27. Between an Israelite and a Foreigner
- a. 2 Samuel 15:19-20 – David shows *chesed* to Ittai the Gittite.
28. *Chesed* as the Attitude of Man to Yahweh
- a. Nehemiah 13:14 – Nehemiah says to Yahweh, “Do not blot out my acts of *chesed* which I did in the house of my Yahweh.”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Can you share about a *chesed* relationship in your life?
- What is your reaction to learning that David and Jonathan showed *chesed* to each other?
- How do you feel knowing that God’s *chesed* is not restricted to the borders of Israel as per Ruth and Orpah?
 - Wasn’t His *berit* (covenant) just with the people of Israel?

THE END

MAY THE *CHESED* OF YAHWEH AND THE *CHESED* OF PEOPLE IN YOUR LIFE TRULY BLESS YOU AND MAY YOU SHOWER PEOPLE WITH *CHESED* AS THE LORD GUIDES YOU AND THE HOLY SPIRIT OPENS UP SUCH DOORS!