

5 November 2023

Hesed

Dear Sisters and Elders,

There is a word used more than 250 times in the Hebrew Old Testament for which there is no exact translation into English. The word is “hesed”.

Here are 3 examples where it is used to describe the mercy and lovingkindness of God towards us:

- Exodus 20:6 “And shewing mercy [hesed] unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.”
- Exodus 34:6 “And the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, The Lord, The Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness [hesed] and truth”
- Jeremiah 32:18 “Thou shewest lovingkindness [hesed] unto thousands, and recompensest the iniquity of the fathers into the bosom of their children after them: the Great, the Mighty God, the Lord of hosts, is his name”

And here are 3 examples where “hesed” is used to express a feeling of mercy and kindness between individuals:

- 1 Samuel 18:3 “Then Jonathan and David made a covenant, because he loved him as his own soul [hesed].”
- 2 Samuel 9:1 “And David said, is there yet any that is left of the house of Saul, that I may shew him kindness [hesed] for Jonathan’s sake?”
- Ruth 3:10 “And he said, Blessed be thou of the Lord, my daughter: for thou hast shewed more kindness [hesed] in the latter end than at the beginning, inasmuch as thou followedst not young men, whether poor or rich.”

On the website, GotQuestions.org, there is a response to the question, “What is the meaning of the Hebrew word hesed”? The entry is instructive:

“Many biblical words such as mercy, compassion, love, grace, and faithfulness relate to the Hebrew word hesed (חֶסֶד), but none of these completely summarize the concept. Hesed is not merely an emotion or feeling but involves action on behalf of someone who is in need. Hesed describes a sense of love and loyalty that inspires merciful and compassionate behavior toward another person. Hesed surpasses ordinary kindness and friendship. It is the inclination of the heart to show ‘amazing grace’ to the one who is loved. Hesed runs deeper than social expectations, responsibilities, fluctuating emotions, or what is deserved or earned by the recipient. Hesed finds its home in committed, familial love, and it comes to life in actions.”

In the October 2022 Liahona, President Nelson’s March 31, 2022 talk to Priesthood leaders at general conference was published. President Nelson spoke comprehensively about the word “hesed” and referred to it as a **covenantal love**. This becomes especially relevant as he tells us that “Once we make a covenant with God, we leave neutral ground forever.” And

because of that, *“God will not abandon His relationship with those who have forged such a bond with Him.”* He goes on to explain that *“all those who have made a covenant with God have access to a special kind of love and mercy. In the Hebrew language, that covenantal love is called hesed.”* He summarized his thoughts on this by declaring that *“Hesed is a unique term describing a covenant relationship in which both parties are bound to be loyal and faithful to each other.... Hesed is a special kind of love and mercy that God feels for and extends to those who have made a covenant with Him. And we reciprocate with hesed for Him.”*

It is because of this covenantal love that God continues to help us change and forgives us when we repent. President Nelson says that *“Because of our covenant with God, He will never tire in His efforts to help us, and we will never exhaust His merciful patience with us. Each of us has a special place in God’s heart. He has high hopes for us.”*

Why are we having so much success across the mission when we teach covenants? Because the Holy Ghost is bearing witness to our friends that there is a deeper, richer, more powerful covenantal love available to them that they have never experienced. It is because of the Restoration of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and becoming a part of the Abrahamic Covenant through baptism that experiencing God’s hesed is even possible.

The Atonement of Jesus Christ is not only the centerpiece of the Father’s Plan, but also at the center of the Abrahamic Covenant, of which we are a part either through birth or adoption. Thus, God’s hesed is rooted in this magnificent sacrifice of His Son Jesus Christ.

The power and protection of our covenants cannot be underestimated. In this same talk, President Nelson promises that *“Those who keep their covenants with God will become a strain of sin-resistant souls! Those who keep their covenants will have the strength to resist the constant influence of the world.”*

Therefore what?

1. We have all made covenants with God, both at baptism and in the temple. Elders have also made priesthood covenants. Therefore, we have all left neutral ground. We are now in a covenantal relationship that requires adherence to the conditions of the covenant. We have promised God that we will only exercise our agency within the boundaries of our covenants (The Box). Why was Israel scattered? Because they broke their covenant.
2. If we are not repenting and changing, we are missing the magnificence of God’s hesed for us. Part of our covenant relationship is our commitment to repent when we sin.
3. Do we live up to the high hopes and high expectations that God has for us? Are we becoming sin-resistant?
4. Showing hesed for God means exact obedience. It means integrity in everything we do. It means never willfully rebelling or hiding a sin.
5. Hesed only comes to life through our actions. For example, the effort we put into our missionary purpose. The intensity and duration of our prayers. The focus we put into our personal scripture study. The regularity of our repentance.

6. Are we loyal to God in our call as missionaries, seeking only for His approval, or do we seek more after the praise of the world and horizontal “likes” from the world? Do we reciprocate His hesed towards us with complete loyalty to Him? Do we have the strength to resist the influence of the world?

May we all experience more of God’s hesed in our own lives by yielding our hearts to God and living fully inside our covenants. May we show this hesed to others by fulfilling our missionary purpose. May our hearts be made soft by iteratively living the Doctrine of Christ so that our loyalty will be to only God and not to the influences of the world. May we all become more sin-resistant as we experience and share God’s hesed.

All My Love,

President Kunz