

## OT *Ḥesed* in the NT

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### Introduction

Hebrew scholars have debated at length the meaning of *ḥesed* in the OT corpus. Research shows the meaning of *ḥesed* is between two poles, “loyalty” or “covenant faithfulness”<sup>1</sup> on the one hand and “lovingkindness” or “non-obligatory act of grace”<sup>2</sup> on the other. The different conclusions of the meaning of *ḥesed* should not surprise one because even the ancient Versions have different translations for the same Hebrew word.<sup>3</sup> Also, knowledge of the word is somewhat limited because the cognates of *ḥesed* cannot be traced at present. These factors should not cause despair because *ḥesed* has a wide usage in the Hebrew Bible, which is the most important factor in determining the meaning of a word.<sup>4</sup> This paper will argue that divine *ḥesed* is first and foremost ontological. Functional *ḥesed* (“do *ḥesed*”) issues from the nature of Yahweh thus Yahweh has always and will always freely do *ḥesed* according to his nature or character. Therefore we may argue that divine *ḥesed* is both free and constraining. It is free in the sense that Yahweh is free in all of his actions. However, divine *ḥesed* is always constrained

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<sup>1</sup> D.A. Baer and R. P Gordon, “Loyalty . . .” “חֶסֶד,” in *The New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. Willem A. Van Gemeran (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 2:211.

<sup>2</sup> Greifswald H.-J. Zobel, “Lovingkindness . . .” “חֶסֶד,” in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 5:51.

<sup>3</sup> The predominant translation in LXX is ἔλεος, *miserationis* in Vulgate.

<sup>4</sup> *Ḥesed* is used 245x in the OT, and it will be shown that usage is the only guide to ascertain the meaning of this word. However, difficulties occur, for *ḥesed* appears in seemingly contrasting contexts, some emphasizing love, and others faithfulness. Throughout this paper, the case will be made that previous approaches to the study of this word have fallen to the “Unwarranted restriction of the semantic field” fallacy in their pursuit of the meaning of *ḥesed*. For this terminology cf. D.A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 57-60. In other words, some scholars, in their desire to know the meaning of this word, have successfully eliminated valid meanings of this word because they have not analyzed the individual contexts correctly.

by his nature. Yahweh freely does *hesed* in accordance with his nature. Divine *hesed* means loyal or faithful love, which Yahweh usually but not always reveals through faithfulness to his merciful covenant. In conjunction with this foundational thesis, the paper will defend that Jesus Christ is the culmination of God's *hesed* in redemptive-history.

### **Andersen and Glueck**

In order to show the relationship of this thesis to previous studies in *hesed*, we shall compare it to the works of Francis Andersen and Nelson Glueck. Andersen wrote a comprehensive essay on *hesed* about twenty years ago, and he defends that *hesed* means “a quite spontaneous expression of love, evoked by no kind of obligation.”<sup>5</sup> In this essay, he states clearly that he opposes Nelson Glueck’s conclusions on the meaning of *hesed*.<sup>6</sup> Glueck’s study of divine *hesed* concluded:

(1) God’s *hesed* can only be understood as Yahweh’s covenantal relationship toward his followers. (2) If God’s *hesed* is comprehended in this manner, then it is certain that only those who stand in an ethical and religious relationship to him may receive and expect His *hesed*. (3) God’s *hesed* corresponds to the demands of loyalty, justice and righteousness and already contains these concepts. God’s *hesed* and ‘*emeth* are to be considered a hendiadys, in which ‘*emeth* has the value of a descriptive adjective. (4) God’s *hesed* is the *result* of His covenant, or His promise or oath.<sup>7</sup>

As one will see, Andersen argues that Glueck has misunderstood cause and effect with reference to *hesed*. Glueck clearly states that *hesed* is the *result* of a previous covenantal arrangement.

Andersen argues that “doing *hesed*” is not confined to a previously established covenantal arrangement. He argues:

We shall point out numerous instances in which, (i) *hesed* denotes behavior that copes with an emergency for which custom and contract provide no norms (*hesed* is not prescribed); (ii) *hesed* is an expression of love and generosity which a person need not have been expected to do (*hesed* is not obligatory); (iii) *hesed* behavior is surprising, ingenious (the

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<sup>5</sup> Francis I. Andersen, “Yahweh, The Kind and Sensitive God,” in *God Who is Rich in Mercy*, ed. Peter T. O’Brien and David Peterson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986), 42.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>7</sup> Nelson Glueck, *Hesed in the Bible*, trans. Alfred Gottschalk (Cincinnati: The Hebrew Union College Press, 1967), 102 (emphasis added). Glueck had more conclusions, but Andersen’s contention is mostly with these.

stories are told, and they are exciting, precisely because they are so unusual); (iv) the act of *hesed* is supremely meritorious, but the performer could not have been blamed for its omission; (v) *hesed* issues in covenant, rather than from covenant; (vi) there are even cases of *hesed* which arise from a conflict of love with loyalty, and involve the performer in acts of treachery or crime.<sup>8</sup>

Andersen and Glueck disagree in at least two respects. First, Andersen argues that *hesed* means non-obligatory love because it is usually in context with words such as grace or compassion. For Glueck, *hesed* corresponds to righteousness, justice, and loyalty. Second, Andersen maintains that *hesed* has no necessary relation to covenant. He maintains that *hesed* is done between individuals or between God and humans with no prior arrangement. *Hesed* is done within covenants in certain contexts, but *hesed* is incidental to covenant therefore a covenant is not necessary for “doing *hesed*.” Glueck maintains that *hesed* is the result of covenant; therefore *hesed* is done between parties in covenant with each other. Glueck does not deny grace, but he distinguishes *hesed* from grace. Grace is the foundation of the covenant which God establishes with people. *Hesed* does not establish a covenant, but is the result of the covenant.<sup>9</sup>

These two scholars have produced valuable studies, and each one emphasizes each of the proposed meanings of *hesed*. Can we navigate between these studies? If so, how shall we navigate between them? Both emphases, love and loyalty, should be emphasized in the study of *hesed*. In one sense, Andersen is correct to distinguish *hesed* from external obligation. Nothing extrinsic to God obligates him to save Israel or humanity. This action is completely free grace in one sense. However, Andersen does not emphasize that God is not free to act contrary to his nature, which *hesed* is a part. In this sense *hesed* is expected and intrinsically obligatory. *Hesed* is a part of God, and he must do *hesed* with the people he has committed himself. Andersen deemphasizes faithfulness and God’s commitment to Israel and to the patriarchs, even after God

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<sup>8</sup> Andersen, “Yahweh . . .,” 44.

<sup>9</sup> Glueck, *Hesed* . . ., 102.

has freely chosen to enter into covenant with Israel (see below).

Glueck emphasizes God's obligation to Abraham in Gen 24:13-14, 27 when he says, "The *hesed* of Yahweh is, therefore, not to be understood as "grace," "favor," or "kindness," but as covenantal relationship between him and Abraham."<sup>10</sup> Glueck does advocate that *hesed* is love, but it is a love which conforms to loyalty and obligation, and thereby fulfills the conditions of the covenant.<sup>11</sup> A nuance should be introduced to Glueck's argument in order to avoid the idea that God is extrinsically obligated to do *hesed* even once he is in covenant. Yahweh is abounding in *hesed* by nature (Ex 34:6), thus when He remains committed to the merciful or gracious covenant made with the patriarchs he is acting in a consistent manner with who He is. In this way, God cannot do otherwise than is in his nature. This aspect of God's *hesed* cannot be reduced simply to extrinsic legal terms. God is bound intrinsically to do according to his nature. He cannot do otherwise than what is in his nature to do. God freely binds himself to a covenant inaugurated by his gracious election and remains faithful to it in a manner entirely consistent with his nature (cf. Deut 7:9-12 below). Because God has bound himself to his covenant, by nature he remains faithful to it. Once he has entered into this covenant, his nature of which *hesed* is a part will not allow him to retract it. His people marvel at all his free works on their behalf, yet they know Yahweh and trust that he will act in accordance with who he is.

### **Program for Analysis**

Due to the focus of this study, instances of *hesed* are limited to the divine-human relationship in the Pentateuch with special attention given to those texts where Yahweh's "great *hesed*" is in view.<sup>12</sup> *Hesed* is used 20x in the Pentateuch, and fifteen are relevant to the focus of

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 71.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 73

<sup>12</sup> This limitation does not obstruct the overall purpose of this paper because as will be seen, those certain Mosaic passages establish the foundation for the rest of the biblical examples of Divine *hesed* to human patients. Cf. Andersen, "Yahweh . . .," 44-45. These texts are the starting point for Andersen, who says, "The centre-piece for any study of *hesed* must be the cluster of related passages in the Pentateuch which contain the

this paper.<sup>13</sup>

After considering Hebrew usage in the Pentateuch, we will consider the LXX translation of the more crucial texts in order to understand the translators' rendering of *hesed*.<sup>14</sup> To the knowledge of the present writer, this step has been undervalued in studies of *hesed* in the past, and should be pursued as a means to understand this word. Generally, the LXX Pentateuch provides the reader with a formal equivalence translation of the Hebrew text. The LXX text has been established for the passages under consideration and no textual variants between LXX and the Hebrew text occur. Therefore the translator's interpretation of the Hebrew text is the only objective.

Finally, after correlating the two, the NT data will be presented. A less explored area in biblical studies seems to be the relation of OT divine *hesed* to the NT corpus. Some studies have made observations about *hesed* in the NT, but not systematically. Either the commentator does not observe the allusion to the OT or one does not theologize after making the observation. These two tendencies have resulted in rudimentary theologizing of this biblical theme in the NT.

After the biblical data and theology have been treated, some synthetic remarks will be made concerning the relationship between the testaments in the categories of continuity/discontinuity.

### ***Hesed: Meaning and Defense***

This section of the paper will comment on those fifteen occurrences of divine-human

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famous statements that God is "abundant" in *hesed*, that he "maintains" *hesed* . . . Wherever this statement appears it is at once primal and final. Primal, not only in antiquity, but as the foundation of all else. Final, because the uncovering of the name and character of Yahweh in the most desperate crisis situations, and in appeals to that revelation, is the deepest point in God that humans can reach."

<sup>13</sup> Gen 19:19; 24:12, 14, 27; 32:11, 39:21; Ex 15:13; 20:6; 34:6, 7; Num 14:18, 19; Deut 5:10; 7:9, 12.

<sup>14</sup> All LXX citations will be taken from the Göttingen *Septuaginta* where available (LXX citations from 1-2 Samuels are taken from Rahlfs). Also, all biblical citations are the present writer's own translations unless otherwise noted.

*hesed* in the Pentateuch. After we analyze these texts, we will turn to the more significant renderings of LXX of the passages looked at.

### **Divine *Hesed* in the Pentateuch**

The following fifteen passages will be examined: Gen 19:19; 24:12, 14, 27; 32:11, 39:21; Ex 15:13; 20:6; 34:6, 7; Num 14:18, 19; Deut 5:10; 7:9, 12. These texts provide the foundation for an understanding of *hesed* in divine-human relations, and this foundation will become pivotal for understanding *hesed* in the NT.

**Genesis 19:19.**<sup>15</sup> This passage contains the first usage of *hesed* in the Hebrew Bible. On the face of the text, Lot is surprised because the angels of Yahweh have chosen to save him. Lot recognizes this act as “grace” (*hēn*) and the angels “making great their *hesed* with” Lot. What does *hesed* mean in this context? In context, this verse is the climax of a narrative that begins in 18:16 and is developing until this point.<sup>16</sup> Chapter 18:17 tells the reader that Yahweh is concealing what he is about to do (destroy Sodom), and then begins expounding on what Abraham will become and that he and his seed will be faithful in keeping the commandments that the Lord commanded (v. 18-19). Verses 17-19 are non-sequential, thus they are not on the main event line, which means the narrative is stopped while Yahweh relays his intentions. In verse 20 the narrative resumes with the *wayyiqtol*. Also of importance is vs. 19, where the “way of Yahweh” is identified as doing “righteousness and justice.” Yahweh reveals a part of his

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הַנְּהַגְתָּ נָא מִצָּא עַבְדְּךָ חַן בְּעֵינֶיךָ וַתִּגְדַּל חַסְדֶּךָ  
אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתָ עִמָּדִי לְהַחְיֹת אֶת־נַפְשִׁי

<sup>16</sup> Contra Tonson who does not see dependence of the Lot narrative on the previous one, but his motive for separating the two narratives is the Abrahamic tradition focuses on righteousness, and the Lot tradition focuses on kindness and mercy, not righteousness (111-13). Because of this criterion, Tonson is forced to exclude what he calls the “interlude” from the purview of his study. The interlude comprises 19:27-29, and includes a reference to Abraham, and God’s remembrance of him in the salvation of Lot. Paul Tonson, “Mercy without Covenant: A Literary Analysis of Genesis 19,” *JSOT* 95 (2001): 95-116. This study will assume a unity of narrative and the LXX treatment of this text below will demonstrate that the writer is not alone in seeing a unity of composition. See also Gordon Wenham’s careful work on the literary structure of 18-19 in Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis*, WBC vol. 2, (Dallas: Word Books, 1994), 41. Wenham views 18:16-19:29 as a chiasm where the second half of the story mirrors the first.

nature to the reader by speaking of his “way.” In verses 20-21, Yahweh speaks of the outcry against Sodom and that their sins are exceedingly sinful. He then says that he must go down to see if the cry coming to Him will end. If it will not end, then he knows, i.e. he knows that destruction must come to Sodom and Gomorrah.

In 18:22, Abraham stands before Yahweh, and asks, “Shall even you sweep away the righteous with the wicked?” And in verse 25, “Far be it from you! To do according to this word, to kill the righteous with the wicked . . . will not the Judge of all the earth do justice?”<sup>17</sup> Abraham pleads for the deliverance of the righteous in the city when he pleads on the basis of the “way of Yahweh.” The whole narrative becomes a “test” for Yahweh: will he sweep away the righteous with the wicked? Will the Judge of all the earth do justice? The end of the narrative tells the reader, no. In 19:27-29, the narrator says that God “remembered Abraham” in connection with the deliverance of Lot.<sup>18</sup> Thus Lot’s deliverance is in direct relation to God’s own character revealed to Abraham. Abraham now knows that he can truly rely on a God who acts in accordance with his own way, when God spares Lot from being destroyed with the rest of the wicked.

How do these observations contribute to our understanding of *hesed* in Gen 19:19? The surrounding context indicates the *hesed* shown to Lot was not as “free” as some have taken it.<sup>19</sup> Of course it was “free” in that God magnified it, but Andersen may affirm too much here. If God had not acted on Lot’s behalf, God would not have acted in accordance with his own way of justice and mercy, and as a result, Abraham would have had reason to doubt the promises of

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<sup>17</sup> It is interesting to note that at no time in this narrative is Abraham rebuked for talking this way. Neither Yahweh nor the narrator rebukes him.

<sup>18</sup> The concept of remembering someone or something, of course has to do with remaining faithful to the person cf. Gen 8:1.

<sup>19</sup> Francis Andersen, “Yahweh, the Kind and Sensitive God,” 52-3. Andersen does not even comment on the surrounding narrative when he says, “To put the matter negatively, if Abraham had not intervened, if Lot had not been warned, or if he had not heeded the warning so that he perished in the overthrow, one could not say that God has reneged on a recognized “liability”.

God. Instead Abraham knew Yahweh's way and pleads on the basis of it. For God to act otherwise than according to his own way (character or nature) would be impossible. God's *hesed* in this context does not mean kindness,<sup>20</sup> and it does not mean fulfillment of an external obligation on account of covenantal relations.<sup>21</sup> Rather, the context indicates that God acts in faithful accordance with his own way or character. He is bound intrinsically to act consistently with his nature (justice and righteousness) in the gracious salvation of Lot. By this revelation of God's character, Abraham knows that God will deal with him according to his way.

The LXX of Genesis 19:19 offers an interesting interpretation of Yahweh's *hesed* made great to Lot. First, the translator translates *hēn* with ἔλεος, which is the only time this happens in Genesis.<sup>22</sup> Second, he translates *hesed* with δικαιοσύνη, as he does on four other occasions.<sup>23</sup> Wevers' comments on Gen 24:27 are worth noting, "As at 32:10 it [δικαιοσύνη] occurs in coordination with ἀλήθεια. When the two are presented as a pair to describe God's action over and against the patriarchs, they refer to his carrying out what had earlier been an object of an oath in his name, which is now being fulfilled."<sup>24</sup> Although Wevers does not offer an explanation for Gen 19:19, an explanation can be given in light of the context of Genesis 18. Genesis 18:19 speaks of Yahweh's way as "righteousness and justice," which Abraham pleads on the basis of for the sparing of the righteous within the city. The narrator's comment in 19:29 recalls God's faithfulness to Abraham in the salvation of Lot. The translator in all probability knows these factors, and relates Lot's salvation to both mercy and righteousness, the former because all God's salvific acts are merciful, the latter because God's faithful character is called into question as He relates directly to Abraham (19:29).

<sup>20</sup> *Hēn* is used in this context as well, so *hesed* does not mean grace here.

<sup>21</sup> There was no covenant made with Lot. One could consider Lot under the covenant made with Abraham, but the text does not make this explicit.

<sup>22</sup> John Wevers, *Notes on the Greek Text of Genesis*, SBLSCS 35, (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993), 277.

<sup>23</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 356.

**Genesis 24:12, 14.**<sup>25</sup> Abraham’s servant prays that God would meet him while on this mission, and that God would “do *hesed*” with his master, Abraham. In verse 14, the servant prays for a sign to God by which he will know that God has done *hesed* with Abraham. *Prima facie*, this text does not support the view of loyal or steadfast love because there is no mention of a particular promise given to the servant concerning the issue he is praying. Andersen makes this point, and concludes that God’s answer to this prayer was not according to law or custom. God would not have been liable had he not answered the prayer of the servant. Andersen makes a distinction between asking God to fulfill his word and asking him to do *hesed*.<sup>26</sup> Andersen would be correct, but he depends on *hesed* not meaning loyal love from the outset. Does the context support a view of “spontaneous love?” Isaac needs a wife in order for the seed of Abraham to continue, and descendants are intricately connected to the promise given to Abraham. The provision of Isaac’s wife would demonstrate to the servant God’s *hesed* with Abraham. God would faithfully provide the means for the fulfillment of his own promise to Abraham— *hesed*.

In this section, Andersen questions whether God *must* provide a wife for Isaac because of Abraham’s obedience. In the larger context, Abraham’s obedience and the result of God’s promised blessing are crucial (Gen 22:16-19). Does Abraham have a claim on God because of his obedience according to this text?<sup>27</sup> Although Andersen answers negatively, his question concerning this text is misguided. The point does not seem to be who has a claim on whom. The question is will God act according to his character which necessarily involves fulfilling his promise by providing a wife for Isaac (=“do *hesed* with Abraham”). Abraham’s obedience is

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<sup>25</sup> וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי אֲדָנָי אֲבִרְתֶּם תְּקַרְתֶּנּוּ לִפְנֵי הַיּוֹם וַעֲשֵׂה יְחֻסָּךְ עִם אֲדָנָי  
אֲבִרְתֶּם:

<sup>26</sup> Andersen, “Yahweh . . .,” 54-55.

<sup>27</sup> Idem

surely important, but it does not force God's hand. Rather, Abraham's obedience functions as an affirmation of God's previous pronouncement over him (Gen 15:6; James 2:20-24). This text does not support either the view of spontaneous love or God's legal faithfulness to Abraham based on his obedience. The text teaches that God acts faithfully according his nature by the keeping of his word (Abraham will have descendents through Isaac). Yahweh's dealings with Abraham in this context are consistent with his nature when he keeps his promise to Abraham. By nature Yahweh keeps his word. This view removes both external legalism on the one hand and spontaneity on the other from the purview of *hesed*.

**Genesis 24:27.**<sup>28</sup> The first occurrence of the word pair *hesed w'emeth* occurs here. Abraham's servant prays to God when Rebekah comes to him and does every thing the servant prayed for. The servant recognizes this action as God's *hesed w'emeth* to Abraham. God did not forsake his true *hesed* with Abraham. Interestingly, Glueck and Andersen agree that this collocation should be read as hendiadys, where the second noun attributes a quality to the first.<sup>29</sup> However, they disagree on the meaning of it. Glueck says this collocation emphasizes the quality of loyalty already present in *hesed*.<sup>30</sup> Andersen translates the phrase, "genuine *hesed*." This phrase does not emphasize loyalty, but qualifies the type of *hesed*, which is love.<sup>31</sup>

The LXX yields another occurrence of *δικαιοσύνη* as a translation for *hesed* in this context.<sup>32</sup> The translator interprets the act as God's faithfulness to the previous oath he made to Abraham, thus emphasizing the faithfulness aspect of *hesed*. The point is not God's legalistic keeping of an oath. The point is faithfulness to the oath which he swore freely, and he keeps in a

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<sup>28</sup> וַיֹּאמֶר בְּרוּךְ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי אֲדֹנָי אַבְרָהָם אֲשֶׁר לֹא־עָזַב חֶסְדּוֹ וְאֱמֶתוֹ  
מֵעַם אֲדֹנָי אֲנֹכִי בְּדַרְכֵי נְחֻנֵי יְהוָה בֵּית אָחִי אֲדֹנָי:

<sup>29</sup> Andersen, "Yahweh . . .," 55. Glueck, *Hesed*. . ., 102.

<sup>30</sup> Glueck, *Hesed*, 72.

<sup>31</sup> Andersen, "Yahweh . . .," 55.

<sup>32</sup> See Wever's comments on this text under Gen 19:19 above.

way consistent with his nature. The oath is not somehow outside of God as if it were dictating to God what to do. Rather the keeping of the oath is entirely consistent God's nature, and so God is intrinsically bound to keep it.

**Genesis 32:11.**<sup>33</sup> Jacob is praying to God about all that God has done for him. Jacob says that he is “too small” for all of the *h<sup>a</sup>sādīm* and for all the *'emeth* which God has done with his servant. Jacob refers to the blessings that God has given him during the time of his absence from home. He crossed the river with a staff, but now he is as two camps. Jacob recognizes that God has done *hesed* with him. Jacob is not worthy of the way God has dealt with him, but God has treated him thus anyway. Did Jacob earn the *hesed* of God? Was God obligated to do *hesed* with Jacob? According to Jacob, he had not earned *hesed*; he was “too small” for it. Two principles come to the fore here: (1) God has promised to be with Jacob (Gen 28:11-15), so *hesed* means faithfulness to God's word in this context. (2) Jacob does not view the relationship as legalistic. Jacob has done nothing to deserve this favor from God. Jacob is astonished at God's faithfulness (*hesed*) despite his unworthiness.

This text supports a dual sense of *hesed*: (1) Jacob recognizes God's love to him, and does not presume on God's *hesed*, (2) yet the larger context indicates that God's *hesed* means he is fulfilling his own promise to Jacob. In doing *hesed* with Jacob, God acts freely in accordance with his promise, which he made to Jacob. If God does not do *hesed* with Jacob, God will violate himself. Instead God does *hesed* with Jacob in a way consistent with his nature. The LXX translation emphasizes the latter with *δικαιοσύνη* for *hesed*. God did not remain faithful to his promise to Jacob out of external legalism, yet his nature intrinsically constrains him to be faithful to his word spoken to Jacob. Jacob marvels at the faithfulness of God to his word, not

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<sup>33</sup> קִטְנִיתִי מִכָּל הַחֲסָדִים וּמִכָּל הָאֱמֶת אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתָ אֶת־עַבְדְּךָ כִּי בְּמִקְלִי  
עֲבַרְתִּי אֶת־הַיַּרְדֵּן הַזֶּה וְעַתָּה הֵייתִי לְשָׁנִי מִחַנּוּת:

his worthiness to receive God's blessing.

**Genesis 39:21.**<sup>34</sup> The narrator says that Yahweh was with Joseph, and He extended *hesed* to him, and He bestowed his grace in the sight of the chief of the prison. The text yields at least two observations: (1) there is no previous covenant made with Joseph and the narrator does not mention any previous promise to the patriarchs in this text. (2) *Hesed* is collocated with grace in this verse meaning that *hesed* may mean “love.” However, this meaning is not at all clear in this context.<sup>35</sup> The meaning “loyalty” fits the context just as well as, “kindness.”

Perhaps the best interpretation is that *hesed* means loyalty, but this text seems to infer that *hesed* may not always be confined to a covenantal arrangement (unless the larger patriarchal covenant is in view here). “Yahweh was with Joseph” indicates a relationship between the two.

Yahweh's *hesed* is a part of His nature primarily—not the covenant which usually reveals *hesed*. Yahweh usually does *hesed* in covenant, but Yahweh's *hesed* is not confined to covenants. The narrator does not perceive a covenantal arrangement between Joseph and Yahweh, but a relationship where Joseph must trust on Yahweh's loyalty to him as revealed to him in the past (39:2; 37:22, his life is spared).

The LXX reading seems to fit this interpretation as well. The translator used ἔλεος instead of δικαιοσύνη as the equivalent for *hesed*. Perhaps he recognized the lack of covenantal arrangement between Joseph and Yahweh. However, ἔλεος in Genesis may still mean loyalty to an expressed covenantal promise (24:12, 14).

**Exodus 15:13.**<sup>36</sup> “You led this people by your *hesed*, whom you have redeemed; you

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<sup>34</sup> וַיְהִי יְהוָה אֶת־יֹסֵף נִיט אֱלֹו חֶסֶד וַיִּתֵּן חָנוּ בְעֵינָי שָׂר בֵּית־הַפַּרֹ:

<sup>35</sup> Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 381. He says, “Was loyal,” lit. “extended kindness to” (נִטָּה חֶסֶד) occurs only here in the OT, but the noun חֶסֶד “loyalty” is an important biblical term, often used in prayer to describe God's character. It is his loyalty that prompts him to care for his people and answer their prayers.”

<sup>36</sup> נַחֲמִית בְּחַסְדֶּךָ עַם־נֹו נִאֲלָתָ נִתְלַתָּ בְעַזָּה אֶל־נֹוה  
קָדְשֶׁךָ:

escorted [this people; gapping] by your strength to your holy abode.” Before determining the meaning of *hesed*, two points are crucial for an understanding of this text. First, these lines of poetry should not be seen as parallel, so any interpretation that involves seeing *hesed* as “strength” or similar to this is most likely to be wrongheaded.<sup>37</sup> Second, this verse is a part of Moses’ song which interprets the preceding narrative, which includes Yahweh’s deliverance of the people. Therefore, in order to discern the meaning of *hesed* in Moses’ song, one must comprehend the larger context of the Exodus.

Andersen contemplates whether the meaning should be duty or grace in this context, mentioning that the language of kinship and the word “redeem” indicate the former. He concludes that the overall context of the Exodus points to the latter idea because “wonder” (*pele*) is essential to understanding the Exodus. Finally, he concludes that kindness is the central thought in this context.<sup>38</sup> However, Andersen concerns himself with the meaning of נָאֵל and the legal terminology attached to it through the kinsmen custom but he does not mention that the word is only used twice in the book of Exodus, here and in 6:6. In Exodus 6, Yahweh reveals his name to Moses, and attaches promises to it. Yahweh says that he established his covenant with the patriarchs (6:4), and now he has “remembered his covenant.” Yahweh then says, “Therefore . . . I will *redeem* you with an outstretched arm . . .” This passage places the covenant made with the patriarchs in continuity with the redemption of their descendents, the sons of Israel. By the redemption of the sons of Israel, God is remembering his covenant made with the patriarchs. Not only that, but Yahweh has just promised to redeem Israel from Egypt. He has freely and willingly bound himself to fulfill his word. This binding comes from within himself, his character (his Name), and it is essential to look at this promise as God binding

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<sup>37</sup> Andersen, “Yahweh, the Kind and Sensitive God,” 57-58. “The context does not determine the meaning of *hesed* here, because the bicolon is not synonymous.”

<sup>38</sup> *Idem*

himself to his own word.

Returning to 15:13, the exodus has just occurred. Moses can now sing of the redemption of the people, and of how Yahweh as a warrior has led them out by his *hesed*. In this context, *hesed* should mean faithfulness. Yahweh freely bound himself to his promise to deliver Israel, and he fulfilled it by redeeming the people, and this is called *hesed*.<sup>39</sup> This *hesed* should also be seen as further fulfillment of the promises given to the patriarchs.<sup>40</sup>

**Exodus 20:5.**<sup>41</sup> According to Andersen, this passage does not indicate the meaning of *hesed*. He rules out the possibility that “visiting iniquity” is the antonym of “doing *hesed*.”<sup>42</sup> Although Andersen is right that “doing *hesed*” is not the antonym of “visiting iniquity,” he still must prove *hesed* does not mean “faithfulness” or “loyalty” in this context. Exodus 19-24 has all the characteristics of a suzerain-vassal treaty of the ANE. In this treaty, the suzerain-king commits himself (freely, graciously) to various obligations upon the obedience of the vassal. No where is this idea clearer than in Ex 19:4-5, when God declares to Israel all that he has done, and what he will do, *if* Israel obeys his voice. God commits himself graciously to do things for his people if they obey him. The same idea seems to be present in 20:5-6. God will make *hesed* with the thousand generations who love him and keep his commandments. If they obey, God will certainly do *hesed* with them, in the sense of be faithful to the word he has spoken to them to do. If they disobey, this relationship is in jeopardy. The question, then, is not why God *does hesed* with those he enters into covenant with, these terms are already articulated in the terms of

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<sup>39</sup> Note: Faithfulness is the primary sense of *hesed* here, but this point does not mean that all notions of love are absent from the word. Surely, love or compassion is a part of this word as will be seen shortly.

<sup>40</sup> Putting Ex. 6:6 together with 15:13 makes it likely that *hesed* means faithfulness to God’s promise. The promise/covenant was originally given in Gen 17:7, where God said he would surely establish his covenant with Abraham and his descendents after him as an eternal covenant.

<sup>41</sup> וְעָשָׂה חֶסֶד לְאֲלֹפִים לְאֹהֲבָיו וּלְשִׁמְרֵי מִצְוֹתָיו: ס

<sup>42</sup> Andersen, “Yahweh . . .,” 49. He confuses the facts when he says that God is “keeping *hesed*” in Ex 20:5-6, but in fact the idiom “doing *hesed*” is used instead. He rejects the ideas of “showing mercy” because those keeping commandments are not candidates for God’s forgiveness or pity. He also rules out the other “extreme” “to keep faith” because it implies obligation on God’s side which means legalism.

the covenant itself, but how God *guards* or *keeps hesed* for a thousand generations, who have disobeyed him and violated his covenant. To this issue, we now turn.

**Exodus 34:6-7.**<sup>43</sup> This text provides the true foundation for the biblical teaching of Yahweh's *hesed*.<sup>44</sup> Some discussion of the context is necessary, in order to understand these two verses. After Israel agreed to the terms of the covenant in Ex 24:7-8, they soon broke the terms of the covenant when they made the golden calf and worshiped it. This act was in direct violation to covenant's second command (Ex 20:4). Now, the people have become Yahweh's enemies, and the reader would expect Yahweh's attributes reserved for his enemies to be revealed to Israel: **אֵל קָנָא** and **פָּקַד עֵינָי**. These attributes are on display in Ex 32:9-10.

Now Moses plays the role of mediator once again, but now he stands between a sinful people and Jealous God who "visits guilt." How does Moses plead with Yahweh? He begins by recounting the grace of Yahweh in his leading of the people out from the land of Egypt. He then proceeds to make a firm plea when he asks Yahweh "to remember" the patriarchs and what he swore to them "by himself." Moses summarizes the covenant Yahweh made with the patriarchs by speaking of descendants and the land, which they will possess (inherit) forever (32:13). Moses' plea affects Yahweh, because he "relents from the evil which he promised to do to his people."<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> וַיַּעֲבֹר יְהוָה | עַל-פָּנָיו וַיִּקְרָא יְהוָה | יְהוָה אֵל רַחוּם וְחַנּוּן אַרְךָ אַפַּיִם  
וְרַב-חֶסֶד וְאֱמֶת:  
<sup>7</sup> נָצַר חֶסֶד לְאֵלִים נָשָׂא עֵינָי וּפָשַׁע וְחַטָּאת וְנִקְהָ לֹא יִנְקָה פָקַד | עֵינָי אָבוֹת עַל-בָּנִים  
וְעַל-בָּנֵי בָנִים עַל-שְׁלֹשִׁים וְעַל-רַבְעִים:

<sup>44</sup> This point can be established by listing all the places where the Scripture writers make direct allusion back to this exact place in Israel's history. Of course there are historical critical issues, but the best explanation seems to be that this great and awesome experience would account for the later usage of the phrase in the more developed liturgy of the Psalms and the much later pleas of the Prophets for Israel to repent. The phrase "great *hesed*" is used in the following places: Num. 14:18; Joel 2:13; Jon 4:2; Neh 9:17; Ps 86:5, 16; Ps 103:5.

<sup>45</sup> Space does not permit it, but the writer takes this phrase to be an example of accommodated language, for Yahweh does not ultimately change his mind, but in another real sense, his stance towards the people did change, demonstrating that God's anger can be curbed due to his covenantal promises, people's repentance or other various reasons.

Yahweh decides to send his angel ahead of the people, for he will not go with them, or else he may destroy them in the way because they are a stiff-necked people. Moses cannot accept the resolve of Yahweh, and pleads on the basis of God's favor. Yahweh has told Moses that he has found favor in his sight (33:12). Moses pleads with Yahweh to show him his glory on the basis of the favor shown to him. Yahweh agrees to show him "the rear side" of his glory, but more importantly he will proclaim his name to Moses. Yahweh's name is "I will be gracious with whom I will be gracious and I will have compassion with whom I will have compassion" (33:19). Ex 33:19 brings perspective to 34:6-7, when Yahweh calls out his name again as he passes by Moses, "Yahweh, God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and great *hesed* and truth, who *guards hesed* for a thousand generations, bearing the guilt, transgression, and sin; He will certainly not acquit, visiting the guilt of fathers on the sons and on the sons of sons down on the third and fourth generations."

What does *hesed* mean in Ex 32-34?<sup>46</sup> Andersen believes this passage gives the final word on *hesed*: free kindness or grace. He uses words such as "unaccountable" or "inexplicable" to describe divine *hesed*. On the one hand he is right to see *hesed* as the free grace and mercy of Yahweh in this text, but on the other he commits the unwarranted restriction of the semantic field fallacy because he does not mention the opening of Moses' plea with Yahweh which invokes Yahweh's accountability to his promise and to the oath which he swore by himself to the patriarchs. Both aspects of *hesed* are emphasized in this text.<sup>47</sup> That the present writer is in

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<sup>46</sup> Andersen, "Yahweh . . .," 51. He states, "*Hesed* has no cause outside God himself. The oftheard terms "obligation," "responsibility," "duty," "solidarity," which now dominate the translation of *hesed* have no place whatever in this reality . . . The mystery finds enigmatic expression in the context—another declaration of "the name of the Lord" (Exod 33:19): 'I shall be gracious to the one to whom I am gracious (*hnn*) and I shall be compassionate to the one to whom I am compassionate (*rhm*)'." It is futile to attempt to explain these ultimate attributes of God in terms of anything else. And *hesed* likewise, which clusters with *rhm* and *hn* here, is primal, inexplicable and *unaccountable* (emphasis added)."

<sup>47</sup> Andersen is so careful to guard God's freedom and keep it from legalism, but in so doing he uses the word "unaccountable." The present writer has often imagined Moses in conversation with the Islamic god, Allah. Allah is a god of pure will and is unaccountable in the highest sense. Everything he does is unexpected and inexplicable because his nature and character have not been clearly revealed to humans. Moses does not plead with

danger of illegitimate totality transfer or unwarranted adoption of an expanded semantic field<sup>48</sup> should be ruled out because both aspects of *hesed* are present in the context. Divine *hesed* is ontological in this passage (34:6), yet *hesed* is also functional (34:7). Because *hesed* is a part of God's nature, he does *hesed* with people. **God is free to have grace on whomever he will (33:19), yet his nature intrinsically binds himself to have grace on them in a way consistent with whom he is. In this context, God has freely spoken a promise to the patriarchs and has freely bound himself to it. If God were to act contrary to the promise he had made, he would have violated himself, something he cannot do by nature.**<sup>49</sup>

The LXX of Ex 34:7 is helpful as the translator is clearly struggling with how to translate נָצַר חֶסֶד because of the context.<sup>50</sup> LXX has a doublet. Wevers argues that the translation has the same parent text as MT but employs a double translation to further define what “guarding *hesed*” means. The Exodus translator has already used both “mercy” and “righteousness” as equivalents for *hesed*, and probably, here he sees both mercy (possibly from 20:6, and now 33:19) and righteousness (from 15:13, and now possibly from 32:13) as interpreting “keeping *hesed*.” It can not be proven with absolute certainty, but in all probability ἔλεος presupposes the meaning of this doublet in other LXX contexts because of the significance of this text.

**Numbers 14:18, 19.** The content of Numbers 14:18, 19 overlaps with Exodus 34:6-7.

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Yahweh as with a God who is unaccountable, but rather he pleads with Yahweh who has freely covenanted himself with the descendents of the patriarchs. He pleads on the basis of God's faithfulness to his promise, and if God were to break this covenant with Israel, he would break the oath he swore by himself, and thus his character would be impugned. Instead he mercifully remains faithful to the covenant people, revealing himself to be a loyal loving God.

<sup>48</sup> Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, 60-1.

<sup>49</sup> God swore “by himself” when he swore to the patriarchs (32:13).

<sup>50</sup> John Wevers comments on this passage are particularly helpful, “For the first attribute, נָצַר חֶסֶד, Exod has a doublet rendering: καὶ δικαιοσύνην διατηρῶν with the participle as exact rendering for נָצַר, and καὶ ποιῶν ἔλεος. The noun ἔλεος renders חֶסֶד at 20:6, but it is rendered by δικαιοσύνη at 15:13. The B+ text has omitted ποιῶν but this seems to be an attempt at stylistic improvement. The doublet probably originates with the Sabbath commandment in 20:6, but must be original with Exod, the longer text serving the purpose of more fully explaining what נָצַר חֶסֶד means.” John W. Wevers, *Notes on the Greek Text of Exodus*, SBLSCSS 30, (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990), 557.

Moses appeals to the character of Yahweh so that Yahweh might pardon the people's sin of rebellion. Yahweh agrees to pardon the people, but he chooses not to bless the first generation by denying them access into the land. Does this violate the *hesed* of God? *Hesed* is a part of God's nature and all interpretations of this text must account for the fact that God is doing *hesed* with his people in the wilderness. If the word means kindness, then God would violate his *hesed* with the people, but if *hesed* means faithfulness or loyalty then God is acting in accordance with his character and the terms of the covenant when he chooses to punish the people. The contrast in God's ways can be seen because Caleb and Joshua are allowed to go into the land because they have followed the Lord fully (14:24, 30). Divine *hesed* is ontological, but God does *hesed* on the basis of the covenant he made with the people. Joshua and Caleb obeyed the Lord and the Lord will bless them because of it, but the rest of the people have disobeyed the Lord and they will die in the wilderness, without receiving what was promised. In both cases, God has done *hesed* with Israel.

**Deuteronomy 7:9-12.**<sup>51</sup> Here it is necessary to make three points: (1) the close proximity of *b<sup>e</sup>rith* and *hesed*.<sup>52</sup> (2) The continuity of Israel's salvation with the oath sworn to the patriarchs. Moses says that because Israel is obeying these judgments and they are keeping and doing them, Yahweh, their God, will keep for them the covenant and the *hesed*, which he swore to their fathers. (3) The context begins in verse 7. Yahweh's election of Israel is not based on anything they are or have done, but on account of love and on account that Yahweh is keeping the oath he made to the patriarchs. Both love and faithfulness to the oath with the patriarchs are the reasons for Yahweh's deliverance of Israel. Love and loyalty are placed along

12 וְהָיָה עֵקֶב תִּשְׁמְעוּן אֶת הַמִּשְׁפָּטִים הָאֵלֶּה וּשְׁמַרְתֶּם וַעֲשִׂיתֶם אֹתָם  
וְשָׁמַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיךָ לְךָ אֶת־הַבְּרִית וְאֶת־הַחֹסֶד אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע לְאַבְרָהָם:

<sup>52</sup> This word pair occurs many times in the Hebrew Bible: 1 Ki. 8:23; 2 Chr. 6:14; Neh. 1:5; 9:32; Ps. 25:10; 89:29; 106:45; Isa. 54:10; Dan. 9:4.

side of each other as the reasons for Israel's election.

### **Conclusion**

The above passages teach two aspects about divine *hesed*. (1) The reader should not see an "either or" approach to its meaning, but rather a "both and" one. The word has the aspects of loyalty and free grace. The first aspect, loyalty, does not necessarily mean loyal to a covenant contract (Gen 39:21). Genesis 19:19 demonstrates this point. Also, Ex. 34:6-7 shows that God does not act in loyalty to the Mosaic covenant, for God would have annihilated his people if he had acted solely in accordance with that covenant alone. But God freely chose to act in accordance with the promise given to Abraham in the relenting of his anger (Ex 32:13). God's action in this context is described as *hesed*. *Hesed* is a part of God's nature, not a legal term denoting commitment to covenant primarily. *Hesed* involves loyalty to his own way or acting consistently with his nature. This is frequently revealed in a covenant relationship. Either of these aspects may be emphasized in any given context. (2) Divine *hesed* (or righteousness in LXX) means God's loyalty to his own way or character, which necessarily will include loyalty to his word, oath, and covenant, which he makes with people. This aspect of the word allows for divine freedom so that God may freely enter into covenant with man, but also divine accountability to himself because God binds himself to his word or covenant. This point can be seen in no clearer place than in the NT presentation of Yahweh and Jesus, and to this we now turn.

### **Divine *Hesed* in the NT: Displayed in and through Jesus Christ**

Turning to the Greek NT to find a Hebrew word is clearly impossible. Does the concept of *hesed* appear in the NT? One would expect a dominant theme in the OT to appear on

the pages of the NT. How would one analyze Hebrew *hesed* in the NT?<sup>53</sup> This section will attempt one venue of study of God's *hesed* in the NT, and it will involve one of the clearer links between the Hebrew Bible and the Greek NT, the LXX.

How should LXX be used in the case of Hebrew *hesed*? The most lucid way to begin is to find the more dominate translation equivalent for *hesed* in LXX and determine how the translator uses it.<sup>54</sup> As we observed above, at times the translator chose δικαιοσύνη as a better semantic loan, and at others he used ἔλεος as a better choice for the same Hebrew word. This challenge to find the right translation equivalent for *hesed* may indicate its dual sense of loyalty and compassion; however, most of the LXX uses ἔλεος as the translation equivalent, even though ἔλεος does not have the sense of loyalty in Hellenistic Greek according to the lexicons.<sup>55</sup> This means that ἔλεος is a good example of semantic borrowing because it already has the sense of compassion in the target language, but now borrows the sense of loyalty from the Hebrew source language. In the case of the NT, the NT borrows from the LXX.<sup>56</sup> However, the NT does not use ἔλεος as a Septuagintalism in every occurrence of the word. Rather, at times the NT retains the Hellenistic Greek meaning of mercy and compassion, as the following will show.

The following study will attempt to make three points. First, the NT authors employ contextual markers when referring to Yahweh's *hesed*. Second, ἔλεος in the NT retains its usual

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<sup>53</sup> As the present writer has thought and is still thinking about this whole issue, there could be many angles of doing this very study, so he has chosen one of many. Other studies that involve the language of the divine promise such as "inheritance," "blessing," and "seed" etc. could be used to elucidate God's *hesed* in the NT.

<sup>54</sup> The present writer has in mind the three options that Karen Jobes and Moisés Silva outline: loanwords, loan translations, and semantic loans or semantic borrowing. They define semantic borrowing as, "The process is fairly clear: speakers first notice some semantic correspondence between a word in their language and a similar word in the foreign language, then proceed to bring the usage (i.e. distribution) of the two closer together. Another way of looking at this phenomenon is to regard it as a case of semantic extension: if we view the semantic areas covered by the terms as two overlapping circles, semantic borrowing involves extending the area covered by one word so that the overlap becomes greater or even complete." Karen H. Jobes and Moisés Silva, *Invitation to the Septuagint*, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 109.

<sup>55</sup> LSJ s.v. ἔλεος "Pity, Mercy, Compassion." BDAG s.v. ἔλεος "Mercy, Compassion, Pity, Clemency."

<sup>56</sup> This concept is known as a Septuagintalism.

Hellenistic Greek meaning, “mercy,” in the NT. Third, some demonstration will be given to support that ἔλεος is also a Septuagintalism for Hebrew *hesed*.

### **Contextual Markers for Hesed**

In the OT, ἔλεος is used with certain words which authors employ in the same context. By revisiting LXX Deuteronomy 7:9-12, some of the terms used in conjunction with ἔλεος may be ascertained. Deuteronomy 7:9-12 is important because of its foundational place in the canon, which means later authors will develop the already existing theme. After looking at Deuteronomy 7, this section will examine other examples of ἔλεος in connection with other terms in other contexts. Ascertainment of these terms in LXX will aid the study of ἔλεος in the NT.

Deuteronomy 7 uses about five different terms in a context where ἔλεος is the focus. Terms such as ὄρκος, ἐκλέγω, διαθήκη, πατέρες, ὄμνυμι (ὄμνύω) are scattered across verses 6-12, and they indicate the loyalty of God to his word (*hesed*) to the patriarchs. The NT texts below use these terms in contexts which contain ἔλεος.

Other texts connect ἔλεος with διαθήκη. 1 Sam 20:8 (human to human example) reveals that David wants Jonathan to do ἔλεος with him because Jonathan has brought him into the διαθήκη of the Lord. David asks for Jonathan’s loyalty and compassion because Saul is trying to kill him. Ps 88 (89):29 contains a reference to Yahweh keeping his ἔλεος and his faithful διαθήκη with the Davidic king. This text rests on the foundation of 2 Sam 7:14-15. Here, Yahweh first pledges his ἔλεος to David and David’s house by promising that his throne will be established forever. The Davidic king in connection with ἔλεος becomes important in the NT as well. Ps 105 (106):45 places διαθήκη and ἔλεος in parallelism. For the sake of the people, God remembers (μιμνήσκομαι) his covenant and he relents according to his great ἔλεος.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Cf. note 53 for more examples of this word pair.

Micah 7:20 contains an example of ἔλεος with ὄμνυω and πατέρες. The prophet is confident that God will show ἀλήθεια and ἔλεος to the people, as God swore to the fathers of old. Also, the allusions back to Abraham and Jacob will become significant for the NT. These names become important for identifying ἔλεος as *hesed* in the NT. Ps 88 (89):50 uses ἔλεος with ὄμοσας. The Psalmist asks, “Where are your ancient ἐλέη, oh Lord, which you swore to David in your truth?” God swore ἔλεος (*hesed*) to David; therefore, the Psalmist can ask where God’s ἔλεος is at the present time. Apparently, the Psalmist doesn’t see the loyal love of the Lord in the current circumstances.

Another important phrase in LXX is “remember ἔλεος.” Psalm 24 (25):6 says, “remember (μιμνήσκομαι) your compassions and your τὰ ἐλέη.” The Psalmist calls Yahweh to remember his faithful love, which is from of old. David calls on the Lord to remember His ἔλεος, and not his sins. David wants God to deal with him according to His loyal love, not his own disobedience. Ps 97 (98):3 has a similar phrase, “He has remembered (ἐμνήσθη) his τοῦ ἐλέους to Jacob and his τῆς ἀληθείας to the house of Israel.” Psalm 135 (136):23 says, “God remembered us, for his ἔλεος is forever. God’s faithfulness (remembrance) to his people remains because his ἔλεος is forever.

The concept of “inheritance” (κληρονομία) also comes into close proximity with ἔλεος in LXX. Consider Ps 135 (136):21-22. The Psalmist identifies Yahweh’s giving of the land as an inheritance, an inheritance for Israel. The inheritance is Israel’s because the Lord’s ἔλεος is forever. The NT develops and fulfills the OT theme of inheritance. Some NT authors attribute this fulfillment to God’s ἔλεος.

The LXX uses ἔλεος in close proximity with the following words: κληρονομία, μιμνήσκομαι, ὄμνυω, πατέρες, διαθήκη, Δαυίδ, ὄρκος, ἐκλέγω, Ἀβραάμ ἀλήθεια. There may be more

important words, but in the NT these words will mark ἔλεος as a Septuagintalism. These contextual markers are not arbitrary, for they occur with ἔλεος in contexts where God's loyal love is referred to. The NT authors also use ἔλεος in connection with these words in order to develop the great OT theme of God's loyal love.

### **ἔλεος as mercy in the NT**

The NT continues to use ἔλεος as mercy in Luke 10:37 with the good Samaritan. The man understood that the one who had mercy on the injured Jew was the one who “pitied” him. The concept is also present in some of the epistolary greetings: 1 Tim. 1:2; 2 Tim. 1:2; Jude 2; 2 John 3.<sup>58</sup> Also, Hebrews 4:16 and James 2:13 are other examples of mercy or compassion in the NT in continuity with Hellenistic Greek. The NT still contains usages of ἔλεος as mercy or compassion, but NT also uses ἔλεος as a Septuagintalism.

### **ἔλεος as Septuagintalism**

The examples are few because we are leaving some of the more debated instances aside at present.<sup>59</sup> This leaves the study with about five good examples of ἔλεος as Septuagintalism in the NT: Luke 1:54, 1:72; Rom 15:9; Eph 2:4; 1 Peter 1:3. The study will conclude by briefly looking at John's translation of *hesed* with χάρις in John 1:14.

**Luke 1:54-55.**<sup>60</sup> This example may be the most explicit in the NT. The phrase “remembering ἔλεος” and the mention of Ἀβραάμ and the πατέρας indicate ἔλεος as a Septuagintalism meaning “covenant mercy” and “loyal love.”<sup>61</sup> Mary may not understand everything going on inside of her womb, but she knows and sings of the Lord's ἔλεος to her and

<sup>58</sup> Other references to mercy are found in 2 Tim. 1:16, 18.

<sup>59</sup> These usages include: Titus 3:5; Romans 9:23, 11:31; Gal. 6:16. Matt. 9:13, 12:7, 23:23 are examples of loyalty, but are concerned with the human plane, thus left out.

<sup>60</sup> 54-55 ἀντελάβετο Ἰσραὴλ παιδὸς αὐτοῦ, μνησθῆναι ἐλέους, <sup>55</sup> καθὼς ἐλάλησεν πρὸς τοὺς πατέρας ἡμῶν, τῷ Ἀβραάμ καὶ τῷ σπέρματι αὐτοῦ εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα.

<sup>61</sup> Darrell L. Bock. *Luke 1:1-9:50*, BECNT, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 158-9.

to all the ones fearing him (1:50). Her song ends by recounting the works of the Lord, “He has aided his servant, Israel because he has remembered ἔλεος to Abraham and to his seed forever, just as he spoke to the *fathers* (τοὺς πατέρας).”<sup>62</sup> Here, God’s ἔλεος does not simply mean pity or mercy, but Mary is recounting the loyal love of the Lord to Abraham and his seed because of the very events happening inside of her.<sup>63</sup>

**Luke 1:72.**<sup>64</sup> The contextual markers of “μιμνήσκομαι,” “ὄρκος,” “διαθήκη,” “Αβραάμ,” “πατέρες,” and “Δαυίδ” indicate that ἔλεος is a Septuagintalism in this context, and does not mean mercy.<sup>65</sup> The birth of John the Baptist inspires Zacharias to prophecy about the coming of the Davidic king, or the horn of salvation, and his son’s part in this great salvation.

In Luke, ἔλεος (*hesed*) clusters at the beginning and is only seen with the conception of the new and greater Davidic King and the messianic salvation that he will bring to his people Israel. In terms of NT theology, ἔλεος (*hesed*) in Luke-Acts is seen as the faithful fulfillment of the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants. While this analysis may stretch Luke’s purpose, one should remember that Luke focuses on the inclusion of the Gentiles more than the other Gospels. The two volume book of Luke-Acts begins by proclaiming the fulfillment of the Abrahamic and Davidic promises, which include great promises for the nations/Gentiles (Gen 12:1-3). Also, the references to the Davidic King should not be read without reference to universal dominion.

Mary and Zacharias knew that the Davidic King would rule the nations/all humanity, at least one

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 159-60. Bock understands the infinitive to be causal, and Abraham to be the recipient of “remembering ἔλεος,” thus taking “just as he spoke to the fathers” as a parenthetical remark.

<sup>63</sup> Mary understands some issues that relate to God’s faithfulness because the angel has said that the child in her will sit on David’s throne (1:32). This may be why her prayer resembles Hannah’s in 1 Samuel 2:1-10. Bock summarizes the song, “The covenant promises of Mary’s hymn are those of the Abrahamic covenant (Gen. 12:3; 17:7-8; 18:8; 22:18; 26:3; Exod. 2:24; Mic. 7:20). The reference made to the nation has remnant overtones because of Luke 1:50 . . . Such covenant acts extend into the messianic era” (160).

<sup>64</sup> 1:72 ποιῆσαι ἔλεος μετὰ τῶν πατέρων ἡμῶν καὶ μνησθῆναι διαθήκης ἁγίας αὐτοῦ,

<sup>65</sup> The infinitive constructions in v. 72 should be taken as loose result (BDF §391.4). In this case these infinitives indicate the result of the Messiah’s salvation: that he makes *hesed* with the fathers and so that he remembers his holy covenant. Notice the common OT word pair of ἔλεος and διαθήκη. The results of this salvation are in accordance with the oath sworn to Abraham.

day (2 Sam. 7:14-19; Ps 2:8 et al; cf. 1:78-79 for reference to Jew and Gentile). *Hesed* in Luke should be understood as fulfilling the promises given to Abraham, which includes the promise of the salvation of Jews and Gentiles to be brought by the new and greater Davidic King.

**Romans 15:8-9.**<sup>66</sup> Contextual markers for ἔλεος being a Septuagintalism are as follows: “promises to the fathers (πατερῶν)” and “truth (ἀληθείας) or faithfulness of God.” The OT citations which indicate the inclusion of the Gentiles in the praises of God also contribute to the meaning of God’s faithfulness to his promises to the patriarchs. Syntactical difficulties are present in this passage and should be analyzed so that one can better understand the content of *hesed*. Douglas Moo has provided a concise summary of the two options:

(1) Paul might intend most of v. 8 and v. 9a as two parallel assertions dependent on “I say”: I say:

- a. Christ has become a servant of the circumcision for the sake of the truth of God, in order to confirm the promises to the fathers;
- b. and that the Gentiles are glorifying God for the sake of his mercy.

(2) Paul might intend v.8b and v. 9a as two parallel purpose expressions dependent on v.8a: I say that Christ has become a servant of the circumcision for the sake of the truth of God,

- a. in order to confirm the promises made to the fathers;
- b. and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for the sake of his mercy.<sup>67</sup>

Moo and Schreiner<sup>68</sup> adhere to the second option.<sup>69</sup> If this analysis of the syntax is correct, then

Schreiner’s analysis of the particulars is almost certainly to be followed over and against

Moo’s.<sup>70</sup> Schreiner sees the confirmation of the promises coming as a result of Christ becoming

a minister to the circumcision for the sake of God’s covenant faithfulness. He sees the Gentiles

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<sup>66</sup> 15:8-9 λέγω γὰρ Χριστὸν διάκονον γεγενῆσθαι περιτομῆς ὑπὲρ ἀληθείας θεοῦ, εἰς τὸ βεβαιῶσαι τὰς ἐπαγγελίας τῶν πατέρων, <sup>9</sup> τὰ δὲ ἔθνη ὑπὲρ ἐλέους δοξάσαι τὸν θεόν, καθὼς γέγραπται, Διὰ τοῦτο ἐξομολογήσομαί σοι ἐν ἔθνεσιν καὶ τῷ ὀνοματί σου ψαλῶ.

<sup>67</sup> Douglas J. Moo, *Romans*, NICNT, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 876.

<sup>68</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, BECNT, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1998), 755.

<sup>69</sup> For an opposing perspective cf. Jan Lambrecht, “Syntactical and Logical Remarks on Romans 15:8-9a,” *NovT* 42 (2000): 257-61.

<sup>70</sup> Moo suggests that the focus of the faithfulness narrows the promises to the Jewish people specifically due to 9:5 and 11:28, but the focus of the faithfulness has certainly broadened since those chapters. Moo also overlooks the link to *hesed* by calling it mercy all through this section (878). In contrast, Schreiner rightly sees the Abrahamic promises coming to fulfillment with the inclusion of the Gentiles (756).

glorifying God for the sake of God's covenantal mercy.<sup>71</sup> The present writer is not sure whether a distinction should be made between the two ideas of covenant faithfulness and covenant mercy. Christ has become a minister for the sake of faithfulness to confirm the Abrahamic promise and so that Gentiles might glorify God for the sake of faithfulness to the same promises.<sup>72</sup>

**Ephesians 2:4.**<sup>73</sup> This text appears in the middle of an epistle addressed to Gentiles, who have received the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of their inheritance (κληρονομία) for the redemption of a possession for the praise of his glory (1:13-14). Each of these terms, “inheritance”, “redemption”, and “possession” has OT antecedents in the salvation history of Israel. Now, Paul applies these terms to the Gentiles who have become a part of the new people of God, the new humanity (2:11ff). How did they arrive at such a status? Ephesians 2:4 might be the most critical verse in the NT because 2:1-3 pictures the Gentiles lost in sin and under the authority of Satan, but God, *because* being rich in ἔλεος, because of his great love, which he loved us . . . made us alive together with Christ – you have been saved by grace.” Paul is describing the salvation of the Gentiles, which he will describe in salvation historical terms beginning in 2:12. Paul is careful to balance doctrine with salvation history, to show that it was a progression for the Gentiles to enter into the covenants of promise through the incarnation and death of Christ. Paul's usage of ἔλεος with love and grace juxtaposes both ideas of God's faithfulness and his free love in the salvation of the Gentiles. Both aspects are important.

Both of these Pauline texts teach the reader about Paul's views of the Gentiles in terms of continuity/discontinuity. On the one hand he views the Gentiles' inclusion in complete continuity with the OT so that he can say “for the sake of covenant faithfulness” the Gentiles

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<sup>71</sup> Idem.

<sup>72</sup> Paul may use ἔλεος in chapters 9 and 11 differently, but ἔλεος in conjunction with ἀλήθεια almost certainly points to the idea of faithfulness to the promises, which God graciously entered into.

<sup>73</sup> 2:4 ὁ δὲ θεὸς πλούσιος ὦν ἐν ἐλέει, διὰ τὴν πολλὴν ἀγάπην αὐτοῦ ἦν ἠγάπησεν ἡμᾶς

glorify God, and then proceed to cite several OT citations, which demonstrate that Gentiles were to be included with “his people” from the beginning. On the other hand, there is a sense of discontinuity in Paul, when he presents the inclusion of the Gentiles as the result of the God who is rich in ἔλεος. This God did not let sinners remain in their sin, which would have been entirely just, but instead he shows ἔλεος, on account of his great love and grace. Both aspects, God’s binding himself to his own word to save the Gentiles and free grace are important for any discussion of ἔλεος in Paul. God made promises freely which bound him to his word which he will fulfill in accordance with his nature. God’s word regarding the Gentiles will be fulfilled because remaining faithful to his word is intrinsic to God’s nature. However, the other side of this salvation pictures a God of sheer grace, who saves sinners that deserve wrath. Somehow these two aspects, faithfulness to save and free grace, do not contradict.<sup>74</sup> Yahweh’s commitment to his people comes from within, and not from without. The people could not merit his ἔλεος, but once Yahweh commits to saving a people, he must carry it out in order not to contradict his own nature of which ἔλεος is a part.

**1 Peter 1:3.**<sup>75</sup> Of the four texts considered thus far, this text may be the most significant. If a Gentile audience is in view, and such is almost certainly the case,<sup>76</sup> then Peter’s opening statements to these Gentile Christians would have astounded them. The readers are addressed as παρεπίδημοι or “strangers.”<sup>77</sup> Peter tells them that they have been re-begotten for a living hope, for an imperishable, undefiled and permanent inheritance (κληρονομία). He also

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<sup>74</sup> Peter T. O’Brien, *Ephesians*, 165. O’Brien comes close to this point when he says, “It (*hesed*) does not fall within the domain of duty and obligation, though the promise to show mercy leads to a commitment on Yahweh’s part to his people.”

<sup>75</sup> 1:3 Εὐλογητὸς ὁ θεὸς καὶ πατὴρ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὁ κατὰ τὸ πολὺ αὐτοῦ ἔλεος ἀναγεννήσας ἡμᾶς εἰς ἐλπίδα ζώσαν δι’ ἀναστάσεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐκ νεκρῶν,

<sup>76</sup> Although see Karen Jobes, *1 Peter*, BECNT, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 24; although most commentators understand 1 Peter 1:14 and 4:2-3 to refer to Gentiles.

<sup>77</sup> This term has great significance because it only refers to Abraham (Gen 23:4) and to David with the rest of the patriarchs (Ps 39:13) in LXX.

tells them that this salvation was the one sought for by the prophets of old and one which angels long to look, but which has been proclaimed to them now through evangelists by the Holy Spirit from heaven (1:10-12). Peter teaches fulfillment when he applies the OT description of Israel to the new Israel (new people of God) in 2:9-10.

How did this people gain such a magnificent identity? 1 Peter 1:3 contains a causal clause, which gives the reason for God re-begetting the Gentiles: *κατὰ τὸ πολὺ αὐτοῦ ἔλεος*. This is the only occurrence of *ἔλεος* in the NT where *πολύς* describes it. The point becomes all the more clear, when one realizes that this is the phrase in the LXX which renders *rab-hesed* in those eight places that phrase is used.<sup>78</sup> In those eight places, the LXX translates *rab-hesed* with *πολυέλεος*. This occurrence in 1 Peter 1:3 is an unmistakable allusion to Yahweh's *hesed* of the OT. What is the significance in an epistle addressed to Gentiles? God's covenant faithfulness to the Abrahamic promises has finally come to fulfillment, and Peter expresses it in bold language up to this time only reserved for Israel.

The closest parallel to this situation in the Bible is probably the occurrence of the same language (*πολυέλεος*) in Jonah 4:2. Here Jonah is not surprised by God's action of relenting of his anger for those who repent of their sin, for this is the way of Yahweh.<sup>79</sup> However, by Jonah's own admission God acted in accordance with his faithful character towards the Gentile Ninevites. God displays his *hesed* to the Ninevites when he relents from judgment after they repent. God cannot act contrary to his nature. His *hesed* which is revealed in covenant does not only apply to those in covenant. The Ninevites were not in covenant, yet they experience God's

<sup>78</sup> Cf. Exod. 34:6; Num. 14:18; Joel 2:13; Jon. 4:2; Neh. 9:17; Ps. 86:5, 15; 103:8.

<sup>79</sup> Andersen, "Yahweh . . .," 76. Andersen seems to miss the point of this verse with his comment, "These words are the powerful climax to the book of Jonah. They make the point, somewhat disapprovingly, that repentance and forgiveness are more central to God's desires than justice and retribution." Although it is true that God will relent from his anger if the people repent, this can not be separate from justice. Rather this is justice and grace, and Jonah is not surprised by the outcome (this reason alone is why he fled to Tarshish), although he is disappointed to say the least. Jonah knows the nature of Yahweh, and he knew his way of justice and grace on those who repent of their sin.

*hesed* when they repent.

Jonah 4:2 and 1 Peter 1:3 both demonstrate God’s covenant faithfulness to the Gentiles. It is important to see this covenant faithfulness to the promises made with Abraham, and not necessarily Israel at Sinai. It was at Sinai that God’s promise made to Abraham was magnified as Moses pleaded on the basis of it for the people to be spared. These two texts seem to be the most bold in proclaiming the Gentiles’ salvation in continuity with the *hesed* God *guards* for Abraham. Finally, it should be added that 1 Peter heightens this “great ἔλεος” to the Gentiles with his reference to Jesus’ resurrection from the dead. God re-beget Gentiles through the resurrection of Jesus according to his great ἔλεος. The resurrection of his own Son from the dead now reveals God’s *hesed* to the Gentiles.

**John 1:14.**<sup>80</sup> This passage is related to the scope of this paper, although it does not contain the word ἔλεος. Perhaps it is because χάρις is used instead of ἔλεος that some immediately jump to conclusions that John understands what *hesed* has meant all along.<sup>81</sup> However, Köstenberger points out that the only time John uses χάρις is between verses 14-17.<sup>82</sup> He does not develop the idea any further in his gospel. Köstenberger is right to point out the difference between Paul and John here, the former meaning, God’s unmerited favor, the latter meaning, “In this expression, both ‘loving-kindness’ and ‘truth’ refer to God’s covenant faithfulness to his people Israel. According to John, this faithfulness found ultimate expression in God’s sending of Jesus, his one-of-a-kind Son.”<sup>83</sup> Certainly, John views the coming of Jesus as heightened fulfillment of the historical realities at Sinai in Ex 32-34.

## Conclusion

<sup>80</sup> 1:14 Καὶ ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο καὶ ἐσκήνωσεν ἐν ἡμῖν, καὶ ἐθεασάμεθα τὴν δόξαν αὐτοῦ, δόξαν ὡς μονογενοῦς παρὰ πατρός, πλήρης χάριτος καὶ ἀληθείας.

<sup>81</sup> D.A. Carson, *John*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 129. Carson cites the Andersen essay approvingly, when he talks of the “graciousness of the love” that is present in *hesed*.

<sup>82</sup> Andreas Köstenberger, *John*, BECNT, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 44.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 45

As was said above, this exercise is one way of tracing this great theme of the OT in the NT. Multiple allusions still need to be explored to elucidate God's covenant loyal love to his people. However, these six instances from the NT through LXX demonstrate continuity with the OT in terms of God's faithfulness to his covenant people, but they also clearly indicate an eschatological "heightening" from the Pentateuchal narratives due to the entrance of Jesus Christ on the scene of salvation history. They all demonstrate some reliance on the OT narratives for their conceptual base and for their fulfillment of those OT promises.

However, there is much discontinuity in terms of how this "loyal or faithful love" is presented to the new people of God. Now, the final and ultimate referent of those promises has come—Jesus Christ. Ultimately, Jesus Christ was the final referent ('the One') who would abide by Yahweh's way perfectly (Gen 18:19; justice and righteousness; and Ex. 34:6-7 with faithfulness and mercy—loyal love). Of course, Jesus does *hesed* because he is Yahweh in the flesh. It is precisely at this point *hesed* is said to be revealed in Jesus Christ in the NT.

One may also talk about how *hesed* is revealed through Jesus Christ to the new people of God. By his very coming, *hesed* is heightened and magnified. Now that he has come, Yahweh's way is known more fully. Now that he has come, messianic salvation is known more fully. Now that he has come, the final greater Davidic King is on the throne exercising eternal dominion over the nations (Ps 2:8). God's covenant and *hesed* guided the promises through rough terrain at times, but at last, God has brought the Gentiles near through Christ, and it is better than anyone in the OT imagined: there is a new humanity after the cross, which both Jews and Gentiles consist. God's *hesed* brought this amazing event about. The Gentile inclusion was alluded to in the OT, but no one knew just how rich God's *hesed* was, until the advent and work of Christ.

It is not enough to reduce Yahweh's *hesed* as a heightening of the OT only to the coming of Christ, because the NT authors place Christ's work in conjunction with *hesed* as well. Luke 1:68 speaks of God accomplishing redemption and forgiveness of sins (1:77). Luke does not distinguish between the first and second comings in this text; however, 1 Peter does, and Peter connects the new Israel's new life to God's great *hesed* through the resurrection of Christ from the dead. Surely, God's *hesed* is revealed through Christ's person as well as through his work of salvation.

This study attempted to establish the starting point of a study of God's *hesed* in the OT revelation of it through the Pentateuchal narratives, particularly in the Exodus narrative. It then attempted to establish some criteria by which to see this great theme of the OT in the NT by using LXX. Lastly, once NT texts were considered to contain the theme of *hesed*, the content of the theme was expounded and synthesized in the NT context. This context considered the eschatological heightening of the theme in the person and work of Jesus Christ, Yahweh himself.