

HESED

CULTURAL INSIGHT

The principle of *hesed* is one of the most important doctrinal principles in the Hebrew Bible. It is somewhat difficult to translate into English, but the primary meaning of *hesed* is something like “covenant loyalty,” referring to the proper behavior in a covenant relationship. It is often translated in the King James Version as “mercy” or “lovingkindness” because this is how Jehovah acts toward those who enter into a covenant relationship with Him. In His famous statement in Exodus 20:6, Jehovah reminds Israel that He shows “mercy [*hesed*] unto thousands of them that love [Him] and keep [His] commandments.” In Psalm 89:28, the psalmist poetically pairs Jehovah’s mercy (*hesed*) with His covenant, suggesting the close connection between these two concepts. Later in the same psalm, the same word is translated as “lovingkindness,” another common translation. In Psalm 89:33, Jehovah promises to not forsake Israel, even if they break their covenant, because of His “lovingkindness” (*hesed*), or His covenant loyalty. This same concept refers to what the Lord wants out of those who enter into covenants with Him. In Hosea 6:6, the Lord states, “For I desired mercy [*hesed*], and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.” The use of *hesed* here indicates that the mercy that God wants His people to possess is not just being nice or tolerant but instead is being loyal in their covenant relationship with Him.

Related verses

Genesis 19:19	Exodus 34:6–7	1 Samuel 20:8–15
Genesis 20:13	Deuteronomy 5:10	2 Samuel 7:15
Genesis 24:12–49	Deuteronomy 7:9–12	2 Samuel 9:1–3
Genesis 39:21	Joshua 2:12–14	1 Kings 8:23
Exodus 15:13	Ruth 1:8	1 Chronicles 16:34
Exodus 20:5–6	1 Samuel 15:6	Ezra 3:11

Psalm 5:7	Psalm 89	Jeremiah 9:24
Psalm 6:4	Psalm 100:5	Jeremiah 31:3
Psalm 13:5	Psalm 103:4–11	Jeremiah 32:18
Psalm 17:7	Psalm 118	Jeremiah 33:11
Psalm 21:7	Psalm 136	Lamentations 3:22
Psalm 23:6	Isaiah 16:5	Hosea 6:4–6
Psalm 25:7	Isaiah 40:6	Joel 2:13
Psalm 31:7	Isaiah 55:3	Micah 6:8
Psalm 33:5–22	Jeremiah 2:2	Zechariah 7:9

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