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The Generation of *Chesed*

Proverbs 21:21

Whoever pursues righteousness and kindness (*chesed*)
will find life, righteousness, and honor.

It is not uncommon to hear from Biblical scholars that the Hebrew word *chesed* in the TANAKH (or Old Testament) is difficult to translate into English, because it really has no precise equivalent in English.

But for the purpose of this teaching, we really need to try to better understand this word.

Some have tried to define *chesed* as an act that has no "cause."

That seems to be rather close...but there is more to the word.

The Jewish translators that took the Hebrew of the TANAKH and translated it into the Greek Septuagint often chose the Greek word for mercy as a translation for *chesed*.

English versions usually try to represent *chesed* with such words as "loving-kindness," "mercy," "steadfast love," and sometimes "loyalty," but the full meaning of the word can be rather difficult to explain in our language.

On a more structural level, as a language, Hebrew is built upon the shoresh, the traditionally three-letter root. Words derived from a common shoresh share a conceptual, almost-familial relation with one another.

Chesed consists of a Chet, Samekh, and a Dalet.

Loosely construed, the pictogram may suggest a leader who passes beyond the fence (of selfishness) and enters through the doorway of compassion.

It is perhaps important to consider that *chesed* is often found used in the TANAKH in association with a *covenant*.

Chesed is contextually related to a covenant in some way. Keep that in mind throughout this teaching.

The idea of *chesed* being similar to *mercy* and *kindness* communicates to us a type of grace...a holding back from punishment...a punishment perhaps due to us in the context of us breaking the covenant...yet YHWH graciously extends us His mercy.

There is a reason we are bringing this Hebrew word to your attention.

We have a thought-provoking question for you.

If the Torah is forever and unchanging, and what is sin today has always been considered sin, then did the generation following Adam and Eve marry their own brother or sister?

Wouldn't that be sin?

Unless one is highly theologically creative and goes well beyond the written Torah, the sons and daughters of Adam and Eve simply had to marry each other, otherwise you and I would not be here today.

But what about the Torah? Does that mean that the generation following Adam and Eve had to break Torah?

Leviticus 20:17

“If a man takes his sister, a daughter of his father or a daughter of his mother, and sees her nakedness, and she sees his nakedness, it is a disgrace (*chesed*), and they shall be cut off in the sight of the children of their people. He has uncovered his sister's nakedness, and he shall bear his iniquity.

Yes, they had to break Torah?

For what purpose?

For the greater commandment for man, to go forth and multiply:

Genesis 1:28

And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

At this point you might be thinking...wait...are you suggesting that God's instruction for man to be fruitful and multiply necessitated the breaking of Torah, specifically Leviticus 20:17?

Our answer would be yes.

Now some do not like that answer, and they are forced to suggest that the Torah does change, that the Torah was not given till Sinai.

Of course, if that is true, then how did Cain and Able know what type of offerings were expected by YHWH...and why would it have been wrong for Cain to offer whatever he wanted to YHWH? Even

better, if there was no Torah given, how would it be shown to Cain that murdering Able was wrong?

Yes some really want to be able to say that the Word of God can change.

Because this would enable them to proudly state that “see, the Torah has to be able to change, otherwise that generation in the beginning would have had to break Torah, and that simply is not a possible scenario...thus, the Torah could have and did change again after Yeshua...and of course we can now eat pig and lobster after work on Shabbat.”

However, it does not work to suggest that the Torah can change. It does not make sense to suggest that the definition of sin can change...that what was right in YHWH’s eyes yesterday is wrong in His eyes tomorrow. YHWH does not change, and YHWH is the Word...the Word is Torah, and Torah is the Word...the Torah is a reflection of YHWH’s character...We likely have a couple dozen teachings at minimum showing the logical and Scriptural contradictions that surface in an understanding that the law of God can change from one day to the next.

So, then how does it make any sense that the sons and daughters of Adam and Eve were forced to break Leviticus 20:17?

Remember, it is not impossible for certain Torah commandments to conflict.

For example:

The Levites were instructed in the Torah to work on Shabbat, thus profaning Shabbat, yet it was not held against them (Matthew 12:5).

...or for the sake of mercy and kindness to others, we may need to heal on the Sabbath (Matthew 12:12).

There are other examples to consider, and for more on this, please see our teaching “[*Weightier Matters*](#).”

So are we suggesting that the commandment to go forth and multiply was greater, or weightier than the commandment to not marry your brother or sister?

Yes. Absolutely yes.

If the generation following Adam and Eve did not break Leviticus 20, then YHWH’s plan of grace through Messiah Yeshua would have never occurred, and salvation would never have been possible...

So yes, going forth and multiplying was most certainly of greater importance.

But do we have any evidence of this? Because it is not unlikely that you believe everything we have said so far to be rather speculative.

Perhaps you saw the possible clue in our first reading of Leviticus 20:17, but let’s read it again.

Leviticus 20:17

“If a man takes his sister, a daughter of his father or a daughter of his mother, and sees her nakedness, and she sees his nakedness, it is a disgrace (*chased*), and they shall be cut off in the sight of the children of their people. He has uncovered his sister's nakedness, and he shall bear

his iniquity.

So, in the context of a brother and sister consummating a marriage, we are told in the English that it is a “disgrace.”

However, is that what the Hebrew word “*chesed*” means? ...a disgrace?

Maybe. But we already reviewed the usage of the word *chesed* in the TANKH, and loving-kindness is how this word is consistently used contextually, it is how the words is understood through its root meaning, and how the words is understood via ancient pictograph.

So, everything defining *chesed* to mean disgrace in this particular instance seems to contradict everything we understand about the Hebrew word *chesed*.

However, there is an exception.

Chesed in Leviticus 20:17 in the Septuagint was translated into the Greek by ancient Jews as a “a disgrace” in the Greek. English translators likely borrowed and carried forward that translational understanding from the Septuagint. This could suggest that it was a valid way to translate *chesed*, instead of meaning a loving kindness or mercy, it may indeed have meant a disgrace.

In another twist, it appears that all Jews did not agree with the Septuagint translation of disgrace.

The Rabbis connected Leviticus 20:17 to Cain procreating with his sister and populating the world. They understand this particular act of incest to be an act of mercy. - Sifra, Kedoshim 11:11

The way the rabbis present the understanding of *chesed* for Leviticus 20:17 in their writings would be more consistent with the ancient understanding of that particular Hebrew word.

Translators are confused as to why YHWH appeared to call the commandment forbidding the marriage of a brother and sister a kindness, or a mercy...but He apparently did. Translators decided to change it to “disgrace” in the English, because that contextually made more sense to them, and they borrowed understanding from the Septuagint, despite the ancient prevailing understanding of *chesed*.

Sometimes this is rationalized in a particular way.

The most accepted reason is that the Hebrew will occasionally use a word, but in a context with the opposite meaning.

Consider when we may say "that is bad," when we really mean "that is good."

Another example of this is Job 2:9 where the KJV, and some other translations, translate the Hebrew word בָּרַךְ (*barak*) as curse, the opposite of the meaning which is to bless.

However, the KJV may be incorrect and the author really did say "bless God and die."

The reason that we do not think that this is the answer to this translation of *chesed* is that "disgrace" (the ESV translation of חָסַד (*chesed*)) isn't really an opposite of *chesed*, which means "loving-kindness."

Since disgrace and loving-kindness are not opposites, then such an explanation of an inconsistent translation does not suffice.

So then, why would YHWH mention the commandment that forbid brother/sister marriage to be *chesed*?

If disgrace does not define "*chesed*"...why a mercy or kindness...?

But, if we go back to the beginning, and apply the reality that the generation following Adam and Eve had to break this specific commandment, then we realize the profound hint that YHWH embedded in His Torah for this commandment...for that generation, it was indeed a mercy or kindness, that allowed for the world to multiply.

YHWH commanded His people to go forth and multiply, and that was the weightier commandment.

Because of this weightier commandment, perhaps it was considered a loving-kindness by YHWH to allow for the breaking of Leviticus 20:17 to allow for His people to multiply...a similar kindness is afforded to the Levites who are instructed to profane the Sabbath for the sake of the greater good (Matthew 12:5).

It is not uncommon for a Jew to interpret the Hebrew in Psalm 89:3 as "[The world is built with *chesed*,](#)" which is a little different from how it is rendered in most English translations.

The world was apparently built on "*chesed*" ...on mercy, love, kindness, or grace...

It was built on *chesed*...in order for man to multiply, *chesed* was necessary.

There is only one other instance in which *chesed* is not defined in English as related words such as "loving-kindness," "mercy," "steadfast love," or "loyalty."

And that is found in Proverbs 14:34

Proverbs 14:34

[Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach \(*chesed*\) to any people.](#)

Knowing what we know about *chesed*, this is an equally confusing translation.

Interestingly enough, the idea of "*chesed*" (חֶסֶד) in the Hebrew Bible not only includes the idea of loving-kindness, but also of discipline. Moses indicated that the Lord would discipline the Israelites "as a father to his son" in the following verses--

Deuteronomy 8:2-5

[You shall remember all the way which the Lord \(YHWH\) your God has led you in the wilderness these forty years, that He might humble you, testing you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. He humbled you and let you be hungry, and fed you with manna which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that He might make you understand that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord. Your clothing did not wear out on you, nor did your foot swell these forty years. Thus you are to know in your heart that the Lord your God was disciplining you **just as a man disciplines his son.**](#)

The narrative of Psalm 136:10-26 is in DIRECT parallel to Deuteronomy 8:1-10, which is an overview of the Israelites coming out of Egypt into the Promised Land. That is, both passages talk about the exodus from Egypt, the setbacks (divine discipline) and the subsequent victories over their enemies as they emerged victorious into the Promised Land, the abundance of nourishment and foodstuffs, and finally the blessings bestowed upon the Lord for all of his marvelous provisions. Watch how many times *chesed* is mentioned in this parallel:

Psalm 136:10-26

to him who struck down the firstborn of Egypt,
for his steadfast love (*chesed*) endures forever;
and brought Israel out from among them,
for his steadfast love endures (*chesed*) forever;
with a strong hand and an outstretched arm,
for his steadfast love endures (*chesed*) forever;
to him who divided the Red Sea in two,
for his steadfast love endures (*chesed*) forever;
and made Israel pass through the midst of it,
for his steadfast love endures (*chesed*) forever;
but overthrew[a] Pharaoh and his host in the Red Sea,
for his steadfast love endures (*chesed*) forever;
to him who led his people through the wilderness,
for his steadfast love endures (*chesed*) forever;
to him who struck down great kings,
for his steadfast love (*chesed*) endures forever;
and killed mighty kings,
for his steadfast love (*chesed*) endures forever;
Sihon, king of the Amorites,
for his steadfast love (*chesed*) endures forever;
and Og, king of Bashan,
for his steadfast love (*chesed*) endures forever;
and gave their land as a heritage,
for his steadfast love (*chesed*) endures forever;
a heritage to Israel his servant,
for his steadfast love (*chesed*) endures forever.
It is he who remembered us in our low estate,
for his steadfast love (*chesed*) endures forever;
and rescued us from our foes,
for his steadfast love (*chesed*) endures forever;
he who gives food to all flesh,
for his steadfast love (*chesed*) endures forever.
Give thanks to the God of heaven,
for his steadfast love (*chesed*) endures forever.

In other words, "*chesed*" includes the idea of a father's discipline as part of the loving-kindness of YHWH. Both Psalm 136:10-26 and Deuteronomy 8:1-10 are in DIRECT parallel, and therefore we make this connection.

This key now helps us to unlock the particularly difficult verse, Proverbs 14:34, where "*chesed*" appears

to contradict its own meaning

Proverbs 14:34

Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach (*chesed*) to any people.

Proverbs 14:34 (Alternative Translation)

Righteousness exalts a nation,
And reproof is the cleansing (or purification) for the people.

Here chatta'ah (חַטָּאת) = cleansing (or purification), and chesed (חֶסֶד) = reproof as a loving-kindness discipline.

Finally, let's read read Psalm 136:23-24 again.

Psalm 136:23-24

It is he who remembered us in our low estate,
for his steadfast love (*chesed*) endures forever;
and rescued us from our foes,
for his steadfast love (*chesed*) endures forever;

We see that YHWH, "who remembered us in our low estate" (Psalm 136:23), had tendered their setback while entering the Promised Land (as a disciplining father per Deuteronomy 8:5), and therefore YHWH's "*chesed*" was twofold as discipline + lovingkindness.

Also, we see that YHWH, "who has rescued us from our adversaries" (Ps 136:24), had tendered their setback while entering the Promised Land (as a disciplining father per Deuteronomy 8:5), and therefore the YHWH's "*chesed*" was again twofold as discipline + lovingkindness.

We infer this connection between discipline (reproof) and lovingkindness, because this context is in DIRECT parallel with Deuteronomy 8:1-10 and it fits into Proverbs 14:34 quite nicely.

As another interesting note, ancient Jewish translators translated the Greek word for *diminishing, or making less* for the Hebrew word *chesed* found in Proverbs 14:34.

Meaning, a father reproofing or disciplining his children humbles them and brings them low, not out of hatred, but out of a loving-kindness.

Last but not least important, the author of Hebrews in the Brit Hadasha, or New Testament, later picks up on this nuance of loving-kindness and discipline, and relates to YHWH as the "loving father" who disciplines his sons in Hebrews 12:5-7.

Take note of the words we highlighted and consider how the highlighted words contextually summarize our point we established through extrapolation of the usage of *chesed* in the TANAKH.

Hebrews 12:5-7

And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons?

“My son, do not regard lightly the **discipline** of the Lord,
nor be weary when **reproved** by him.

For the Lord **disciplines** the one he **loves**,
and chastises every son whom he receives.”

It is for **discipline** that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. **For what son is there whom his father does not discipline?**

In summary, here is what we covered in this teaching:

- 1) The whole Word of God, which is inclusive of the Torah, is forever and unchanging.
- 2) This means that the generation following Adam and Eve broke Torah, specifically Leviticus 20:17, by marrying as brother and sisters
- 3) A Biblical precedent is established in the TANAKH and Brit Hadasha demonstrating that sometimes commandments contradict and we need to make a wise decision to follow the weightier commandment.
- 4) The weightier commandment over Leviticus 20:17 is the commandment for YHWH's people to be fruitful and multiply (Genesis 1:28) as breaking that commandment would have resulted in no Messiah and thus no salvation for those born up unto that point.
- 5) A possible hint by YHWH exists in the giving of the Leviticus 20:17 commandment itself, calling the commandment a “*chesed*.”
- 6) “*Chesed*” means loving-kindness, steadfast love, faithfulness, and mercy according to Hebraic root meaning, linguistic contextual evidence, and pictogram meaning, and Jewish rabbi interpretations (Sifra, Kedoshim 11:11)
- 7) In Leviticus 20:17, English translators translated “*chesed*” as disgrace, despite all ancient evidence to the contrary, likely because they borrowed understanding from the Septuagint.
- 8) Another problematic translation of “*chesed*” exists in Proverbs 14:34 which does not appear to mean “loving-kindness” on the surface.
- 9) The problematic translation of “*chesed*” as reproof or discipline being a form of loving-kindness from our Father is solved in examination of the parallel of Psalm 136 and Deuteronomy 8. The ancient Jewish translators of the Greek Septuagint appear to illustrate the same understanding in the Greek.
- 10) The author of Hebrews 12 appears to summarize every point we made in better understanding reproof as also being a form of loving-kindness from a father, which is consistent with how we foundationally understand the Hebrew word “*chesed*.”

We hope that you have been blessed by this teaching.

Remember, continue to test everything.

Shalom!

For more on this and other teachings, please visit us at www.testeverything.net

Shalom, and may Yahweh bless you in walking in the whole Word of God.

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