

Notes on *xesed*

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Syntactical distribution

Clearly describes

- actions of God toward his people
- actions of people toward one another.

It is not at all as clear that it ever describes actions of man toward God. The passages usually cited are Jer. 2:2; Hos. 6:4,6; and a series of plurals describing the praiseworthy qualities of political leaders (2 Chr 32:32 Hezekiah; 2 Chr 35:26 Josiah; Neh 13:14 Nehemiah). Jer 2:2 makes the strongest case, but the parallel with Lev 26:45 “remember for their sakes” suggests that even here it is God’s *xesed* toward his people that is in view. This is confirmed by the nature of *xesed* in the cases where we have specific examples. The other cases are best explained by the fact that God requires *xesed* of his people toward one another, and so citation of this *xesed* demonstrates their obedience toward him.

Semantics

Where we have concrete examples of *xesed*, it is

- an act that helps someone else (not just a feeling);
- in a context of reciprocity, such as family bonds or a covenant.

This makes it even less likely that men exercise *xesed* toward God; he has no need of our help. But he does require that we reciprocate his *xesed* toward us by exercising *xesed* toward those around us, and this *xesed* shown by his children to one another is the sign that they belong to him (e.g., John 17:21). Compare Matt 25:40,45; the *xesed* that we show to those in need is counted as a deed of *xesed* toward our Lord himself.

Specific case studies:

Rahab and the Spies.—She protects them by hiding them, and requests protection from them when they invade the land.

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Girdlestone helpfully distinguishes *xesed*, *xasid* → *hosios* from *qd\$* “holy” → *hagios*, the first being practical, the second positional.

Relation with *xasid*

Xasid must be taken as active, because it is a title for God, Ps 18:25; Jer 3:12. When we are called *xasid*, the activity in mind must be that which we exercise toward our fellows in obedience to God, since God has no needs that we can satisfy in deeds of kindness toward him.