

Naked Bible Podcast Transcript
Episode 350
Loving Loyalty and Believing Loyalty
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Episode Summary

One of the more important Hebrew words familiar to Christians is *hesed*, usually translated “lovingkindness” or “steadfast love” in English Bibles. The term certainly conveys those ideas, but those translation options don’t convey the basis of God’s lovingkindness. In like manner, when the term is used of how people are expected to respond to God such translations don’t convey how believers are to show that lovingkindness. In this episode of the podcast, we explore some possible ways to understand *hesed* in relation to believing loyalty, a phrase introduced in Dr. Heiser’s book, *The Unseen Realm* (Lexham Press, 2015), to describe the believer’s salvation relationship to God across both the Old and New Testament.

Transcript

TS: Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 350, Loving Loyalty and Believing Loyalty. I’m the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he’s the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey, Mike! What’s going on?

MH: Well, you know, we’re getting close to Thanksgiving, which would normally be also getting close to ETS/SBL time, which of course... We’re not going anywhere, Trey. [laughs]

TS: No?

MH: We’ve had it nipped in the bud by COVID. But they’re still doing something. We can talk about that a little bit if you’d like.

TS: Yeah, absolutely. And aren’t you speaking virtually or presenting a paper or something?

MH: I am. I was asked by S. Joshua Swamidass, who is the author of the recent book *The Genealogical Adam and Eve*. I think I’ve mentioned this before on the podcast. But I’m part of a panel that’s going to review his book. The moderator for this is William Lane Craig and it’s going to go through the American Academy

of Religion. ETS is also doing one of these panels on the same book. So it's going to get a lot of attention at the meetings, even though they're virtual.

And for those who are maybe not familiar with the book, Josh is a PhD in Genetics. He's also an MD. And his thesis is that current, cutting-edge genetic research in Statistical Genetics is *not* an obstacle to having an historical Adam and Eve, and that we would be ancestors of them. To get there, he has to do one thing that's obvious, that genealogical relationships are not the same as genetic relationships. The Bible pursues only genealogical ancestry because they're not geneticists. They don't know anything about genetics. But also he wants to argue that all of the genetic stuff for other human/hominid forms, that reflects what's going on with populations outside the garden. So it does get into the issue of co-Adamism (humans outside Adam and Eve's line).

So it's a very interesting book, and to me what makes it the most interesting is that the book's been reviewed by a number of people in the atheistic community—the science community. And they don't like his faith. They don't like the fact that he views Adam and Eve as a divine creation amidst all of this other stuff. But as far as the genetics go, they say his work is unassailable. He knows what he's talking about here. He's correct in terms of what the genetics say and what they don't say, and how it's read and over-read and exaggerated and misread. So I think this book's going to get a lot of play in Christian apologetics and so I'm going to be part of a panel discussing it. So that's what's coming up for me. And we are going to have Josh on. I think it's a couple of weeks after that panel. Or maybe a week. I can't remember what the timing is. But we're going to have him on the podcast to talk about his book and we'll get into co-Adamism and all that stuff. In other words, if this is a good way to read both science and the Bible, what does that do? So I'll be interacting with it. There are points in the book that I'm not in agreement with or wouldn't track with, but I think it's still an important work, and so we want to bring it to the podcast audience.

TS: Alright, there you go, Mike. Well, this week we're going into our last topic before we get into our next book study. So here we are. We're at the end of it. We've been going through all summer and here we are at the end of it. So...

MH: Yeah. Well, you know, we had to get here at some point. [laughs]

TS: It's amazing how fast the year has gone. It's crazy.

MH: I know, really, it is.

TS: It's almost over. 2020. Thank goodness, in a way.

MH: Yeah, I hear you. Let's just jump into what we're going to do today. This will be a little bit different of an episode because we're going to focus on one word. We don't usually do episodes on word studies. This isn't going to be sort of a

word study by any particular method. But we are going to focus on one particular term and do word study kinds of things as we think about this term.

5:00

So by way of an introduction, this is going to bleed into or feed off of the concept of believing loyalty that I introduced in *Unseen Realm* back in 2015 when that was published. I didn't develop the concept of believing loyalty. In the book, I introduced it because I thought it was a really helpful way to see salvation as consistent across both Testaments. Since then (2015), there have been a number of works, several important works (Matthew Bates is the major figure here) who have really I think developed the idea. Bates uses the term "allegiance"—the gospel as allegiance—to bring in the loyalty element. But I still prefer "believing loyalty" because it has the word "believing" in there. And Bates has been criticized (I think mostly unfairly) by using the word "allegiance" because then people sort of default to "Well, where's the faith? This is works salvation." No, it's not. That's not what he's saying. But some people who aren't thoughtful enough to actually read the book [laughs] or listen to him sort of get pulled down that path.

On the other side, I can see what their point is. "Allegiance" doesn't quite capture both aspects, at least not to the ear—"gospel as allegiance" idea. I still prefer that we have the word "believing" in there. So I like "believing loyalty" even though we're sort of tracking on the same idea. So I want to take this idea and do something I didn't do in *Unseen Realm* with it and that I haven't seen done, and that is think about a word that's really common in the Old Testament (*hesed*) and ask... This is sort of a thought experiment. I want to ask the question, "If we took a look at this term the way it's used of God and it's also used of people, is there a relationship between how the word is used of both those parties (because those are two parties in the salvation relationship, obviously)? Is there something going on that we can look at the term and see a symbiosis on both sides of the equation in that respect? And might it help us think about believing loyalty in a new way or a better way or at least add some content to that?"

So today I'm just going to engage in a thought experiment. How does believing loyalty relate to this term? Lots of Christians have heard of it. You'll even see it on T-shirts and swag and whatever. But I want to focus on this today. So how does the idea of *hesed* reflect God's character? I want to ask in response to that, "Does it bleed into the concept of believing loyalty, just in general?"

So for those who are familiar with *Unseen Realm*, you're going to kind of know already what I'm tracking on. For those who aren't, you could listen to some of the series on Hebrews (or I would say just go read *Unseen Realm*) for the particulars on that. It's not a whole lot of the book, but it is introduced in the book. It's in the chapter about the Law. So for both the familiar and the unfamiliar out there in the audience, what we're talking about here is believing loyalty (that is, how we relate to God just generally and also through Christ). We believe, and we

need to be loyal to what we believe. We need to be loyal to the savior in whom we believe. And by virtue of that, we're being loyal to the God whose salvation plan the whole thing is.

So we have to have belief, and loyalty (broadly defined) is that we don't choose another gospel. We keep believing. We don't throw our loyalty—align our faith and our loyalty—with anything else because there is no other way of salvation. That idea. So very broadly that's what it is.

So let's get into *hesed* a little bit here and I think you'll see how it relates to the topic. I want to take believing loyalty and ask, "Does believing loyalty on our part reflect God's *hesed* (חֶסֶד)?" The term is often translated "steadfast love" or "loving loyalty" in English Bibles. I actually like that latter one (loving loyalty) because it rings that bell about loyalty. Should we be thinking of believing loyalty as us showing *hesed*? Is it our act of *hesed* toward God and toward the gospel? That's going to be one of the links here. God's *hesed* is rooted in love and not human merit or performance. We're going to see that today as well.

10:00 Nevertheless, because he has shown *hesed* to humanity (specifically a little subset of humanity, the descendants of Israel)... Remember going back in *Unseen Realm*, we've got the disinheritance of humanity at the Babel event, the Deuteronomy 32 worldview, and then God decides to create a new humanity through Israel. He calls Abraham and Sarah and raises up a child through them. So God is showing loyalty to his original plan (to have a human family—to be their God and for humans to be his people), but it's not to everybody because he has divorced humanity. He's showing *hesed* to... He's expressing his loving loyalty to having humans as a family to one particular group, and he's going to use that group to bring others back in—others that were disinherited back into the family, back into the fold. But when he expresses this (when God shows this) it's through covenant. It's through a covenant relationship. It's an exclusive relationship. God comes to Abraham. Abraham doesn't invite him. But God comes to Abraham and they have this conversation. God chooses Abraham. And "I'm going to do this, that, and the other thing." He makes promises to Abraham. But Abraham can't just look at God and say, "Alright. That's great. It's awesome. I believe it. I believe it," and then the next day turn around and say, "You know, I'm going to go off and worship this other god. Thanks for your promise. You've bound your own hands. You promised, and you're God, so you have to keep your promises. But I'm going to go worship Baal now," or something like that. That's not the way it works. God shows his loyalty to humanity through not giving up on Plan A. There is no Plan B. And he does that through one people, and he enters into covenantal relationships with this one people. Even those people don't just automatically get the benefits. They must believe and be loyal. They must have believing loyalty toward Yahweh of Israel. They can't just intellectually believe and then live any way they want or worship any god they want.

This should be old, familiar territory to anybody who's read *Unseen Realm* or sat through the Hebrews series. I'm going over a little bit just for people who are new. This is not earning salvation. You must believe. You don't just go through works. You don't put God in your debt. That is *never true*. God is never in our debt. We don't do things and then God owes us something. That is not the way to look at any of this. We believe, and *because we believe we are going to be loyal*. That's the way we show our love to God. We're loyal to his plan of salvation shown to us through Christ.

So do these ideas have any relationship to how we see *hesed* talked about in the Old Testament (on either side or both sides of that equation)? That's the question. So there have been a lot of devotionals and sermons and Bible studies on this word. I hesitated to do the topic because so many people have heard of it. But honestly, I don't know any that sees this point—that thinks about *hesed* as believing loyalty. Maybe that's the way we should think about the relationship between faith and works. Maybe that's the way we should think about salvation, because it's actually consistent across the Testaments. They have to believe that Yahweh is the God of all gods and only he can give them everlasting life and only he is the way to salvation and forgiveness of sins. They have to believe all this stuff, just like Christians have to believe in Christ. And if they believe, then they will not desert him. They will not go off and worship or believe in some other god or no God at all or make themselves God. Maybe *hesed* is a way to think about that, a way to remind ourselves about it.

I've never seen this anywhere in print. So hence, the thought experiment. There is no merit. The Law is good, but loyalty to it without embracing Jesus as messiah, without belief, doesn't save. And frankly, it didn't save in the Old Testament. There's this thing called "circumcision of the heart" that God was after the whole time.

So, if we look at *hesed* (let's just get into the nuts and bolts first), it occurs 245 times in the Old Testament. So it's pretty common. If you look it up in TLOT... This is a good place to remind people about how I distinguish lexicons. There are lexicons that you look up a word and it's got, like, two sentences, or bullet-pointed meaning options. That's not really a real lexicon. That gives you a list of English glosses. What you want is a resource that's what I call a "discussion lexicon," where they mine the data and then they talk about the data at length. That's what TLOT does. So TLOT notes, hey, it's 245 times in the Old Testament.

15:00

...in the following distribution: Psa 127x [MH: so that's basically half], 2 Sam 12x, Gen 11x, Prov and 2 Chron 10x, Isa 8x, Jer and Hos 6x; further 5x in 1 Kgs, Neh, 1 Chron; 4x in Exod, 1 Sam; 3x in Deut, Josh, Mic, Job, Ruth, Ezra; 2x in Num, Judg, Jonah, Lam, Esth, Dan; 1x in Joel and Zech...

So by far, the lion's share of the usage is in the Psalms. You get some in the Torah, but not a whole lot. Overwhelmingly it's in the Psalms, which is interesting because... What are the Psalms? The Psalms have a lot to do with praise and worship. So it's human thankfulness and praise of God's *hesed*. But you'll also get references to having this as part of our character in the way we treat fellow believers—the way we treat people and the way we respond to God.

So that's what we want to get into today. I should point out that *hesed* has a homonym. There are lots of homonyms in biblical Hebrew (words spelled the same way but they mean something entirely different). The other *hesed* (the homonym) seldom occurs in the Hebrew Bible. One instance is Leviticus 20:17. And I will look that up real quickly because it's quite opposite to what we've been talking about.

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*,

That [disgrace] is the other *hesed*. And in some sources, this *hesed* will be distinguished in a lexicon from the other one. Sometimes they won't be. But just be aware that this isn't an outlier, like “Sometimes the word means the exact opposite of what it means most times.” No, it's just a homonym. So we'll mention that. Go back to TLOT and it says:

The word *hesed* . . . is only insufficiently rendered by the Eng. term “kindness.” [MH: so that doesn't quite cut it, TLOT notes] This insufficiency (summarized in III/8) is demonstrated both by observations—beginning with phrases involving *hesed* (III/1), in the context of the literature on the subject (III/2), concerning grammar and semantics (III/3), and the history of the meaning of *hesed* within its semantic field (III/4)—and by the examination of its profane [MH: its usage in non-liturgical passages in the Hebrew Bible] (narrative literature, III/5; wisdom and Psa, III/6; Chron and related works, III/7) and theological usages (IV/1–5).

So “kindness” is kind of a common English gloss (lovingkindness). But TLOT already notes at the outset that “it's okay, but it doesn't really quite cut it as far as what we're really getting at.” There are things that that meaning or that definition just don't say and that need to be said.

So TLOT, if you have the resource, you'll notice if you look this up, it goes through the full range of usage of the term in conjunction with all those parameters that I just mentioned. Where does it occur in a phrase? What type of literature? Is there anything grammatical going on? Is it a religious text or a common text? All that stuff. Here's some important observations. I'm just going to glean this. I'm not going to read you (obviously) the entry here, because it's pretty long. This is a discussion lexicon, so you get a long treatment of it. A few

observations and then I'm going to go into a few specific passages and apply some of these things.

TLOT notes that *hesed* often accompanies the word *'emet*, which means "faithfulness." That's important because if *hesed* (lovingkindness)... Well, we need another term to characterize what would sort of be a parallel term to *hesed*. And often it's *'emet*, (faithfulness). So there's your loyalty aspect. It's love and loyalty. This is on God's part. He's being faithful to humanity because he loves humanity. So there's both a lovingkindness element and there's a faithfulness element that is often brought in by virtue of pairing this word with *'emet* (faithfulness).

20:00

Another observation TLOT makes in regard to faithfulness is that you'll often see *hesed* linked to covenant (*berith*) language, which would make sense because there's a loyalty element here. Another observation. This is where they're quoting a study by Nelson Glueck. According to Glueck, *hesed* does not refer to a spontaneous, ultimately unmotivated kindness... [laughs] Like it just springs up for no reason. He's saying, "That's not *hesed*. It's not spontaneous—ultimately unmotivated kindness—but relates to a mode of behavior that arises from a relationship defined by rights and obligations." There's your covenant idea again—your loyalty idea. When *hesed* is attributed to God, it concerns the realization of the promises inherent in the covenant. In other words, God is expressing *hesed* toward you or toward his people in relation to the promises he has made covenantally with humanity.

Now humans still have to choose to participate in the covenant. Again, we go back to Abraham. There's this... We've talked about this a number of times on the podcast. There's this myth that the Abrahamic covenant is "absolutely unconditional—no strings attached." Yeah, except where there are. Genesis 17, the circumcision passage... The covenant language is repeated in that passage and linked to Abraham's obedience. Abraham couldn't just turn around and say to God, "Ouch, that's going to hurt. I don't think so. But thanks for promising. You're God and you have to keep those things now, and I'm just not going to do this." No. When Abraham obeys, he's not earning his salvation. He's obeying because he believes in the God who promised him the terms of the covenant.

In Genesis 22 it's the same thing—the sacrifice of Isaac. God specifically links the covenant language and the promises to Abraham's obedience. See, by obedience, Abraham is showing that he wants those things God has promised. He wants to be a recipient, a benefactor, a participant, in the covenant. He believes that God will deliver on what he has promised. And because he believes, he does what God asks. He doesn't say, "Hmm. How do I want to earn the favor of this deity? Well, I'm going to start doing stuff. I'm going to do this, that, and the other thing. And at the end of it, God's going to owe me something." That picture is *not* part of a biblical theology of salvation. It's the cart before the

horse. And believing loyalty, I think, really helps us keep these things straight. And adding the thought that there is no merit... This is not why biblical characters believe. It's not why these things are paired. They're paired because if you really believe this stuff, you'll act like it. You won't betray it. You won't turn some other direction. You'll believe it. You'll stick with it. You'll keep believing.

So I think that's an important note from TLOT. It adds that *hesed* is not, therefore, "grace." It's not the same as grace. And the often suggested "favor" in English translations is insufficient.

Now we're going to see a little bit more of this when we get to Deuteronomy 7 in a moment—that *hesed* also isn't "love," but it's motivated by love. So it's not a synonym for love, but there's a relationship to that idea, too. *Hesed* desires something from its objects. Theologically, all people can expect God to love them. God loves people. "For God so loved the world..." He does. God does love people, but the same is not true of *hesed*. Those who spurn God's love are not recipients of *hesed*. You have to *choose* to believe. You have to *choose* to be a participant in the covenant relationship. And believing that the God who made the covenant can deliver on these promises and no one else can, that's consistent across the Testaments and it is required. It is the precursor. It is number one, and your response to it (i.e., your behavior) is number two. But your behavior doesn't *earn* you number one. God loves you and he wants you to believe. He wants you to believe that he is who he is and he can deliver what he says. That's number one: belief. Faith in him. Okay? You can go off and do all the works of the Law you want. But the first thing God wants is that God wants those works done from a believing heart—the circumcised heart. So anything else is the cart before the horse.

25:00

Another thought from TLOT: *hesed* becomes one of the expressions of Yahweh's being, describing his goodness in the regularly recurring liturgical formula "for he is good (*tôb*), and his kindness (*hesed*) endures forever." It's a phrase that occurs a lot of times in the Old Testament. So it's part of God's nature to be loyal to the people that he loved and decided to be in a covenant relationship with.

And let's go back to Abraham. Even though God doesn't enter into covenants directly with all the nations, when he makes a covenant with Abraham, he tells Abraham (Genesis 17), "You're going to be the father of many nations. It's going to be through your seed that all of these other nations will ultimately be blessed." Abraham becomes a tool in God's hand to accomplish a greater thing than just this one family—this one people. Even when God doesn't directly extend *hesed* to people outside of Abraham, he still loves them and he still makes a way for them to be participants. He still makes a way for them to believe and be loyal to him. In their case, they have to turn from their other gods. And of course, the Israelites can't turn *to* other gods and expect the *hesed* relationship to be fulfilled.

They can't do that. It's believing loyalty. Both things are part of the picture. Both things are important.

So the final thought from my summary of TLOT here: *hesed* is also used mostly of interpersonal relations in wisdom literature. Now this is just my take now. I think one of the reasons that that could be true (that you see *hesed* a lot in the Psalms and just general wisdom literature about how you relate to other people)... you don't do them dirty. You be loyal to the things that you said you're going to do for them. There are these theologically neutral instances of *hesed*. I think the reason why you get it in a lot of these interpersonal relations goes back to the idea of this is how imagers—especially the imagers that are part of God's family, that are redeemed through believing his promises—that's how imagers should relate to one another. They should be loyal. You should do what you say. You should treat people this way. And there are all sorts of ways that the opposite would be working out. But Zechariah 7:9 is just an example of one of these. There are plenty in the wisdom literature, but I like this verse:

⁸ And the word of the LORD came to Zechariah, saying, ⁹ "Thus says the LORD of hosts, Render true judgments, show kindness [*hesed*] and mercy to one another,

It sounds a lot like Micah—that famous passage in Micah about "What does the Lord require?" We'll get to that in a moment.

⁹ "Render true judgments, show kindness and mercy to one another,

This is how God wants to treat humanity. It's how humans should treat each other, especially within the family of God.

Now back to my two-fold thesis, or my thought experiment here. And let me just put it in two more discrete statements here.

1) That believing loyalty on our part reflects God's *hesed* (ἔσδ)—that term usually translated "steadfast love" or "loving loyalty" in English Bibles. I like the loyalty element. "Believing loyalty" is our act of *hesed* toward God and toward the gospel of Christ. We are going to stick with it.

2) God's *hesed* is rooted in love, not human merit or performance. He loves all people. Nevertheless, he shows *hesed* to a subset. He's going to use the subset to bring other people outside of Abraham's family into God's family.

We all understand that. We all get that. But this is how God shows his love for humanity. He decides to redeem. He decides that there is no Plan B. He decides he's going to stick with his original desire. And at this point, post-Babel, the way

to do that—the way God chooses to do that—is to raise up a new humanity through his guy Abraham and his wife Sarah. And it's going to be through them that he's ultimately going to produce a messiah for the whole world.

30:00

So that's my two-fold thought experiment—*hesed*, believing loyalty, on our part. And *hesed* is rooted in love, but it's not synonymous with love. It's rooted in love, and it's expressed in covenant. And covenants have stipulations. That's where the loyalty comes in. In other words, God acts with love and loyalty toward you; you need to act with love and loyalty toward God. And if you love God, you will believe in what he says. I mean, how can you love God if you reject what he says—if you turn toward something else, some other god, some other system? It's not possible.

So let's take a look at some key passages here in the rest of our time. I'm just going to go through. This is in no particular order. That's why it's a thought experiment. Exodus 15:13... This is the song of Moses after they go through the Sea of Reeds (or the Red Sea)—Moses' song about God's deliverance. He says:

**¹³ “You have led in your steadfast love [*hesed*] the people whom you have redeemed;
you have guided them by your strength to your holy abode.**

So the act of redemption here is linked to *hesed*, which makes sense because these are God's people by covenant with Abraham. God is being loyal to his covenant. He's showing *hesed* and he redeems Israel. I think the more important passage, though, is Deuteronomy 7 because this essentially has all the elements in it. Deuteronomy 7 reads this way. I'm going to start in verse 6 and go to verse 9. This is Moses speaking to the people of Israel:

⁶ “For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth [MH: there's the Babel thing, Deuteronomy 32 worldview]. ⁷ It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples,

Let me just stop there. To be honest with it, there were, like, zero until Abraham and Sarah were called. But even afterwards, there are not many of them.

⁷ It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples,

I mean, they start out as a small family. You know, Jacob, Israel.

⁸ but it is because the LORD loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers [MH: he's keeping the oath], that the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

So the Lord loves you. Because he loves you (verses 7 and 8, back-to-back)... "The Lord set his love on you and chose you" because he loves you. "And is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers." There's the covenant loyalty.

...that the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. ⁹ Know therefore that the LORD your God is God [MH: See, this is what you need to believe], the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love [*hesed*] with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations,

Verse 10, he repays those who reject him by *not* extending *hesed*. You know, this passage to me captures all the elements of the believing loyalty relationship and loops in the idea of covenant loyalty on both sides. God is loyal to his promises, and what he expects—what he wants—is for you to be loyal to him. He wants you to (back to Deuteronomy 7):

...know therefore that the Lord your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and *hesed* with those who love him and keep his commandments.

You cannot love God if you do not believe he is who he is. Go back to Deuteronomy 7.

⁹ Know therefore that the LORD your God is God.

[laughs] Okay? These are things you have to believe, you have to embrace. You can't claim to love someone and call them a liar. There are just things that work together like this. I really like the Deuteronomy 7 passage because, like I said, it has all the elements: believing loyalty toward God. God says, "Look, I'm going to carry through my covenantal promises because I loved you. But I'm going to carry through with the way I showed that love at the beginning, years ago, when I made a covenant with Abraham. I'm going to show you the same *hesed*. I'm going to be loyal to you. But what I want from you is your loyalty. No other gods before me. "Know therefore that the Lord your God is God, and that he is the one behind all these covenant promises and is the only one that can fulfill them."

35:00

Again, there are a lot of different passages that we could go to here. Let's look at 2 Samuel 7. I'm just going to pick a few random ones here, just to talk about where the term shows up. 2 Samuel 7:12-17. So let's go there. This is the Davidic covenant passage. So God's talking to David here through Nathan the prophet. And he says:

¹² When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom [MH: notice the specificity of it]. ¹³ He shall build a house for my name [MH: so we know we're talking about Solomon here], and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.

In other words, the covenant promise that I made to you, David, that your dynastic line is the only legitimate one from here and forever, it's not going to die. After you die, we're going to stick with it. Your offspring after you... The promises are going to carry over to that one.

¹⁴ I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men, ¹⁵ but my steadfast love [*hesed*] will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you.

Isn't that interesting? You know, Solomon was far from perfect. Far from perfect. So God tells David through Nathan, "I'm not going to remove... I'm not going to forget the covenant once you're gone. Your son's going to inherit it." Of course, we know that's going to be Solomon. God knows it too. David knows it too, probably, by the time this is written. But then he makes this comparison with Saul. Why did Saul lose this? Why did God withdraw *hesed* from Saul? The answer in short form is 1 Samuel 15:23-28. This is the break event. This is when Saul does not carry through with all of the instructions regarding Agag and the Amalekites. This is the passage where Samuel confronts Saul for his disobedience. "What meaneth the bleating of the sheep?" (I always love that line in the King James.) But Samuel shows up. And all of this was supposed to be destroyed. And Saul has kept back some of the animals and the king (Agag). And Samuel says, "Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice..." And we're going to find out that the obedience here... He's going to talk about rebellion here. Basically loyalty is better than sacrifice. "And to listen [is better than] the fat of rams."

**²³ For rebellion is as the sin of divination,
and presumption is as iniquity and idolatry.**

**Because you have rejected the word of the LORD,
he has also rejected you from being king.”**

So this is when the break comes. In verse 28:

28 And Samuel said to him, “The LORD has torn the kingdom of Israel from you this day and has given it to a neighbor of yours, who is better than you.

David is the one who (as flawed as he is) is always loyal to God. Now if you look up some of this in commentaries, Baldwin has a really nice quote. Joyce Baldwin’s commentary on 1 Samuel. She writes:

In a memorable prophetic utterance, Samuel pronounces for all time the futility of attempting to rely on ritual sacrifice when what is required is obedience. No ceremonial can make up for a rebellious attitude to God and his commandments, because obstinate resistance to God exalts self-will to the place of authority, which belongs only to God. That is why it is as bad as *divination*... and tantamount to *idolatry*, [because] another god, self, has usurped his place.

40:00

I think that’s put really well. This is why. Saul is being more loyal to himself than to God, and God withdraws *hesed* from him. Now you could ask, “What about Solomon?” There are references to Solomon committing idolatry and going after other gods and whatnot. What scholars usually do, and I think it does make sense, is if it’s true that Solomon is the author of Ecclesiastes and written toward the end of his life, he comes full circle. He repents. “This is the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep his commandments.” So again, God knows these things. He knows what’s going to go on with Solomon. He knows what’s going to go on with him, and Solomon comes full circle. He repents of his idolatry. And there’s no designation at Solomon’s death that you see with... You don’t get the descriptive language with him at his death that you do with idolatrous kings. You just don’t. Now it has consequences. This stuff was introduced to Israel during his reign, and then the kingdom’s going to split and then everything just sort of falls apart. So there’s going to be human consequences. And God did tell that to David in 2 Samuel 7. “When your son goes astray, he’s going to suffer this, that, and the other thing, and so on and so forth. But I’m not going to withdraw *hesed* from him.” And he doesn’t, because we have Solomon coming full circle. This is the way scholars (and I think it makes sense because of Ecclesiastes) handle this, in terms of Solomon specifically. But you see the loyalty elements there. They’re very obvious. And you also... The obedience is linked to faithfulness to the true God—to Yahweh. There’s a lot of these passages. Let’s just read a couple more. Ezra 9:9. This is after the exile. So I’m going to read you two post-exilic statements here. Ezra 9:9 says:

⁹ For we are slaves. [MH: [laughs] There's still that sense of exile.] Yet our God has not forsaken us in our slavery, but has extended to us his steadfast love [*hesed*] before the kings of Persia, to grant us some reviving to set up the house of our God, to repair its ruins, and to give us protection in Judea and Jerusalem.

We're still under the Persians. We're still under their thumb. But God has extended *hesed* to us. Again, God is remaining loyal to a remnant. And if the remnant is going to continue to get the benefit of the covenant, they're going to have to not follow other gods. They're going to have to believe, like Abraham did, that Yahweh is the God of all gods. He's the one who's extending love to us through this covenant, and because we believe that he can do what he says he's going to do, because we believe we're going to stick with it, we're going to obey. We're going to trust him.

Now one more here. Hosea 6:6. This is going to sound like the Micah passage. I'm going to read the Micah passage right after this and then a few comments on Hosea 6:6. So God says... Let's go back to verse 4.

⁴ What shall I do with you, O Ephraim? [MH: a reference to the Northern Kingdom]

What shall I do with you, O Judah [MH: a reference to the Southern Kingdom]?

**Your love is like a morning cloud,
like the dew that goes early away.**

⁵ Therefore I have hewn them by the prophets;

**I have slain them by the words of my mouth [MH: your people are under judgment],
and my judgment goes forth as the light.**

**⁶ For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice [MH: what does God desire from people? "I desire *hesed*"],
the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.**

"Knowledge of God." Well, go back to Deuteronomy 7: "Know therefore that the Lord your God *is* God." This is what you need to believe. This is your Shema. [laughs] This is it. You have to believe this and be loyal to it. You can offer all the burnt offerings and sacrifices you want. If you don't have this, you have nothing. You have nothing. "I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice."

Let's go to Micah. This is the more familiar passage: Micah 6:8. This is the one you'll see on T-shirts and whatnot. Because it's very famous.

**⁸ He has told you, O man, what is good;
and what does the LORD require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness [*hesed*],
and to walk humbly with your God?**

That's it. This is what God really wants. Now you take that verse and go back to Hosea 6:6... I'm going to read a little bit from Hubbard's commentary here on Hosea 6:6. Let's just go back there and I'll read it real quickly once more. Verse 5, they're under judgment.

45:00

**⁵ Therefore I have hewn them by the prophets;
I have slain them by the words of my mouth,
and my judgment goes forth as the light.
⁶ For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice,
the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.**

Hubbard writes:

As verse 5 echoes verse 3...

Let me just hit verse 3 for you.

**³ Let us know; let us press on to know the LORD;
his going out is sure as the dawn;
he will come to us as the showers,
as the spring rains that water the earth."**

You know, "let's turn back to the Lord." And then he says, "What am I going to do with you, Ephraim and Judah? Because we know how that's going to go. And so you're under judgment, because I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice." So Hubbard says:

As verse 5 echoes verse 3, so verse 6 expands on verse 4. It is the importance to Yahweh of *steadfast* (covenant) *love* and *knowledge of God* that explains why... his judgment is so severe...

Remember Leviticus 26? Expulsion from the land is linked to what, specifically? Idolatry. Going after other gods. So this is why his judgment is so severe, writes Hubbard.

Here he tells us why: the quest was not accompanied by the essential components of loyalty to God's covenant grace and obedience to his covenant demands (see on 2:19–20; 4:1, 6). The sacrifices themselves were not evil, but they were measurably less important (so the Heb. *min*, *rather than*, NIV, connotes) than the covenant obedience which Yahweh desired and in which he took delight.

Again, covenant obedience does not equal works—dead works. This is what Hosea 6 rejects. “I’m not after works. I’m not after dead works. I’m not after going through the motions with your sacrifices and obeying this or that command. What I want is loyalty. I want you to recognize me, believe I am the true God, the God of all gods. This is what you need to believe, and then be loyal to me, as I am loyal to you.”

So covenant obedience is not about works. It’s not about works without belief. It is not ritual acts. Covenant obedience is believing loyalty to the covenant—exclusive belief in and loyalty to the true God, whose love launched the covenant in the first place. (Back to Deuteronomy 7.)

So just to wrap up here, this was just a thought experiment. But I’m really suspecting that the theological weight of *hesed* in the Old Testament on both sides is a really useful way to understand believing loyalty—the salvation relationship in both Testaments. These are little glimpses. This is the kind of thing that I would develop if there was an *Unseen Realm 2* follow-up, looping this kind of stuff in. But I just thought I would do it here just to illustrate that this idea is not just something that’s sort of a contrived, memorable little phrase. It’s rooted into the way God wants to relate to people, his loyalty to his original plan, and what he really desires from us as believers.

So it seems to me that believing loyalty has always been what God was after. And so it should frame how we understand what he wanted in terms of obedience. He never wanted moral perfection or self-righteousness. There is no merit. Rather, he wanted his people to trust him and him alone for their earthly and everlasting salvation. And he would use Israel as the means to that end after Babel. So it’s never been about a works system or just a physical Israel. It’s always about the heart. And I think a very useful way for understanding that is the concept of *hesed*.

TS: Alright, Mike. I always enjoy the word study ones. And an *Unseen Realm 2* preview. I’ll take a sneak peek any time I can get it. Works for me.

MH: [laughs] Well, this is the kind of thing you’d loop in, you know?

TS: Alright, Mike. Next week we have an interview coming up.

50:00

MH: Yeah, we're going to interview Michael Jehosky. I think I'm pronouncing that correctly. He was recommended by Louis Markos, who's been on the podcast twice. We talked about... Louis is a professor of English and a Tolkien expert. We talked about the relationship of Tolkien's content to what I'm doing in *Unseen Realm*, because Louis had written a very nice review of *Unseen Realm* online. Then we had him on to talk about Milton, as well, sort of Christian traditional demonology. Well, he recommended the person we're going to have on next week, Michael Jehosky, who has just come out with a book called *The Good News of the Return of the King: The Gospel in Middle Earth*. And in the book, he quotes *Unseen Realm*. So he's familiar with my work and he interacts with it a little bit in the book. But I thought it would be another take along the lines of what we did with Louis. But the author here has something very specific that he wants to try to communicate in relationship to how *The Lord of the Rings* sort of retells in a different way by analogy really... He's going to talk about how Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* is essentially a parable of Jesus' parables. So it's going to be a lot of parabolic parable discussion as to how *The Lord of the Rings* accomplishes the same sorts of things about, really, the story of God's relationship to humans— to mankind—that you find in the New Testament. So we're going to have him on, talk about his book, talk about some of these concepts. So it'll be like we were with Louis, a little bit of a different direction, before we turn back into... Heading quickly into the Old Testament in Revelation.

TS: And don't worry. We're going to have Dr. Markos back in in January to cover his book. So for those that love his high energy, he will be back on. [MH laughs] So be looking forward to it. Well, with that, we want to thank everybody for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God Bless.