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Your IxTheo team

EBERHARD KARLS
UNIVERSITÄT
TÜBINGEN
UNIVERSITÄTSBIBLIOTHEK

What is חֶסֶד ? – A Frame-semantic Approach[1]

1. A lexical conundrum

The noun חֶסֶד has been subject to intensive lexicographical study. This might be due to the fact that dictionary entries are not always as convincing as they ought to be. For instance, BDB gives a rather elaborate list of potential equivalents:[2]

> 'goodness, kindness; I. of man: 1. kindness of men towards men, in doing favours and benefits; 2. kindness (especially as extended to the lowly, needy and miserable), mercy; 3. (rarely) affection of Isr. to YHWH, love to God, piety; 4. lovely appearance. II. of God: kindness, lovingkindness in condescending to the needs of his creatures [...]'

The basic meaning seems to be 'goodness, kindness'. There are, however, several details that call for clarification. First, it is not entirely clear why the entry has been split into two main paragraphs, namely, one that presumes a human agent (I), and one that presumes a divine agent (II). Does this imply that, if God is the agent, the lexeme denotes a distinct type of חסד,[3] a different sort of goodness? Second, there seems to be an overlap with the lexeme רחמים since 'mercy' (I.2) is also part of the list. Unfortunately, we are not told what kind of relation holds between the lexemes חסד and רחמים. Third, the sense 'lovely appearance' (I.4) which was possibly derived from Isa. 40.6 is striking. It is not obvious that this sense can be subsumed under 'goodness, kindness', and its occurrence should have been marked as a case of polysemy or even as homonymy.[4]

The entry in HALOT is similarly structured (emphasis in original):[5]

> '1. **obligation to the community** in relation to relatives, friends, guests, master & servants, &c.; unity, solidarity, **loyalty** […] — 2. ḥesed in relation of God to people or individuals, **faithfulness, kindness, grace** […] — 3. pl. ḥᵃsādîm, ḥasdê &c. individual acts flowing fm. solidarity: a) (of men) **godly deeds** Ne 13₁₄; b) (of God) **evidences of grace** Is 55₃.'

Like BDB, HALOT distinguishes between a human (1) and a divine (2) agent of חסד. In addition, the use of the plural form is listed separately (3). The distinction between human and divine חסד (for a singular word use) is even more prominent here than in BDB. No overall sense is given in HALOT. If the agent is human then the assumed meaning is 'loyalty', otherwise (i.e., if the agent is God) the meaning encompasses a rather broad spectrum of divine qualities, including 'faithfulness, kindness, grace',

Finally, the entry in DCH demands consideration:[6]

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1 This study is part of a larger project conducted at the University of Rostock/Germany that is intended to lead to a postdoctoral qualification ('habilitation').

2 BDB, s.v. חֶסֶד.

3 Henceforth the unpointed consonant string חסד will be used to refer to the noun חֶסֶד, not to the verb with the root חסד.

4 See Hadumod Bussmann, *Routledge Dictionary of Language and Linguistics* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1996), s.v. polysemy, s.v. homonymy.

5 HALOT, s.v. חֶסֶד.

'loyalty, faithfulness, kindness, love, mercy, pl. mercies, (deeds of) kindness, a. of Y. to humans, b. of humans to Y., c. between humans, d. of flesh, i.e. its beauty'

In contrast to HALOT, DCH first gives a list of several (i.e., five) translation equivalents before structuring the dictionary entry according to the referents involved. Again, the חסד of 'flesh' stands out as there are no persons involved who do, feel or show חסד. Hence, one is inclined to suppose polysemy or homonymy. Moreover, the relation between the list of translation equivalents and the potential agents of חסד remains unclear. Is it possible to combine each of the equivalents with any agent whatsoever? Is it conceivable that חסד denotes, say, the kindness of humans towards God as well as the faithfulness of God towards humans?

Since the time of Wilhelm Gesenius, the Septuagint has been regarded as an important source for investigating the meaning of Hebrew lexemes.[7] Unfortunately, in the case of חסד, the Septuagint presents us with quite an unexpected standard equivalent, ἔλεος, which slowly but surely developed during the translation of the Pentateuch.[8] The difference in meaning between חסד and ἔλεος is obvious and has given rise to the theory that after the exile חסד adopted the additional meaning of 'pity'.[9]

In each of the dictionary entries just cited, a concise definition of what חסד actually denotes is missing. What dictionary users are looking for (or ought to be looking for) is not only a list of possible translation equivalents but also a definition, i.e., a short text explaining the denotation of the lexeme in question.[10]

The remainder of this article seeks to fill this gap. First, I will survey briefly the history of research concerning the lexeme in question (2). Afterwards, I will present a new methodology, which (3) I will proceed to apply (4). Finally, I will consider prospects for further research (5).

2. What חסד is thought to be – a short history of research

The quest for the meaning of חסד has generated a host of studies. Due to space restrictions and for the sake of clarity, I am concentrating on book-length studies of the 20th century (the earlier two originally written in German) that have had some impact on further research.

2.1. Nelson Glueck (1927)

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6   DCH, s.v. חֶסֶד.

7   Cf. Wilhelm Gesenius, 'Von den Quellen der hebräischen Wortforschung', in id., *Hebräisches und aramäisches Handwörterbuch über das Alte Testament* (eds. F. Mühlau / W. Volk, 10th ed., Leipzig: Vogel, 1886), p. vii. This essay was included in Gesenius's dictionary from the 2nd to the 10th edition (1823-1886).

8   Carsten Ziegert, 'Das Wortfeld von Gnade, Barmherzigkeit, Güte und Treue. Auslegung theologischer Kernlexeme in den Narrativtexten der Pentateuch-Septuaginta', in Walter Bührer (ed.), *Schriftgelehrte Fortschreibungs- und Auslegungsprozesse* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018).

9   Jan Joosten, 'חסד, »Benevolence«, and ἔλεος, »Pity«', in id., *Collected Studies on the Septuagint. From Language to Interpretation and Beyond* (FTA, 83; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), pp. 97-111. For a different interpretation, see Ziegert, 'Das Wortfeld von Gnade, Barmherzigkeit, Güte und Treue'.

10   Cf. James Barr, 'Hebrew Lexicography: Informal Thoughts', in Walter R. Bodine (ed.), *Linguistics and Biblical Hebrew* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1992), pp. 137-151, esp. 145.

The first researcher who dedicated an extensive study to חסד was Nelson Glueck. In his three-part investigation, he consistently distinguished between the lexeme's secular, religious, and theological meaning.[11] This distinction clearly influenced the structure of the entry in DCH (cf. section 1: c, b, a). According to Glueck, the secular meaning of the lexeme חסד denotes conduct between humans, based on a mutual relationship of rights and duties, e.g., between relatives, friends, allies, host and guest, ruler and subject, etc. This meaning has much in common with the concept of a treaty, a ברית, and can thus be described as 'loyalty'.[12] Without doubt, this hypothesis has strongly influenced the entry in HALOT (cf. section 1). The religious meaning of חסד, which occurs mainly in the prophetic literature, extends the secular meaning insofar as it describes interaction between all human beings. This is desired by God and its realisation can be called חסד towards God. Again, חסד denotes conduct in the context of an obligation to the community.[13] Finally, the theological meaning of the lexeme describes God's actions towards humans including forgiveness and salvation. These are driven by an obligation towards the community according to the Covenant.[14] Glueck's approach has had an impact not only on dictionaries of Biblical Hebrew but also on more recent shorter studies.[15]

Glueck' influential study suffers from two methodological flaws. First, he presupposes too strong a connection between חסד and ברית. The fact that חסד can be used in the context of a covenant does not imply that the denotations of the two lexemes are identical, even if they refer to the same entity in a given context. The fallacy of equating two lexemes' denotations if they happen to refer to the same thing has been labelled 'illegitimate identity transfer' by James Barr.[16] Second, Glueck tries to prove his hypothesis of a reciprocal relationship by referring to ancient and contemporary Arabic culture which he deems nearer to Biblical customs than our Western frames of reference.[17] However, Biblical culture is not identical with Arabic culture, whether contemporary or ancient. Although Glueck's study has influenced several generations of scholars his results are not convincing on the whole.

2.2. Hans Joachim Stoebe (1950)

One generation after Glueck, Hans Joachim Stoebe challenged Glueck's use of the lexeme's presumptive 'secular' meaning to draw conclusions concerning its 'religious' or 'theological' meaning. In his doctoral dissertation, Stoebe presents a chronological investigation, starting with texts commonly assigned to the Yahwist and the Elohist. Nevertheless, he follows Glueck in

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11   Nelson Glueck, *Das Wort »ḥesed« im alttestamentlichen Sprachgebrauche als menschliche und göttliche gemeinschaftsgemäße Verhaltungsweise* (BZAW, 47; Gießen: Töpelmann, 1927), pp. 1, 21, 35. The original dissertation (Jena, 1926) contained only the first two of these three parts (i.e., the secular and religious word meaning).
12   Ibid., pp. 3, 12-13, 20-21.
13   Ibid., p. 34
14   Ibid., pp. 50-51, 61, 66
15   E.g., Niels P. Lemche, 'Kings and Clients. On Loyalty Between the Ruler and the Ruled in Ancient Israel', *Semeia* 66 (1994), pp. 119-132; Robin Routledge, 'Ḥesed as Obligation: A Re-Examination', *TynBul* 46 (1995), pp. 179-196. A summary of the research building upon Glueck's monograph until 1967 was given by Gerald A. Larue in an essay included with the English translation; see Nelson Glueck, *Ḥesed in the Bible* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College, 1967), pp. 1-32.
16   James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (Oxford: University Press, 1961), pp. 217-218.
17   Glueck, *Das Wort »ḥesed«*, pp. 3-4, 8, 67-68.

distinguishing between God's חסד towards humans, humans' חסד towards God and humans' חסד towards each other.[18]

In comparison with lexemes of the roots חנן and רחם Stoebe suggests that חסד does not denote an action but rather a generous and kind attitude or a disposition of benevolence. This attitude will result in kind and helpful actions that exceed what is to be expected of the respective person.[19] In the psalms of lament, חסד takes a theological meaning, namely, God's 'free grace'.[20]

Stoebe's investigation is replete with helpful exegetical observations, but problems emerge on closer examination. First, there seems to be too big a gap between the secular meaning of a 'generous and kind attitude' and the theological meaning of 'free grace'. This supposed difference in meaning calls for further clarification. Second, there seems to be a general flaw of methodology. On the one hand, Stoebe challenges Glueck's method of taking the secular meaning as the basis for investigating the religious meaning. On the other hand, he assumes that the Yahwist introduced the common word usage of חסד into the sphere of religious language.[21] If this is the case, however, it would seem necessary to look at the secular meaning first. Third, Stoebe's investigation lacks a coherent linguistic method. His plea for investigating the 'situations' in which words are uttered[22] calls for a cognitive-linguistic framework which is introduced in section 3 of this paper (and which had not yet been developed when Stoebe did his research).

2.3. Katharine Doob Sakenfeld (1978 / 1985)

Another generation passed before Katharine Doob Sakenfeld presented a new study on חסד. Like Glueck, she distinguishes between a secular, a religious and a theological meaning. In addition, she structures her research according to chronology and genre.[23]

As for the secular word use, Doob Sakenfeld postulates that the agent of חסד has some responsibility for the person receiving it. Nevertheless, he is 'quite free not to perform the act' of חסד. This act 'usually fulfils an important need for the recipient […] which he cannot possibly do for himself'.[24] As opposed to Glueck's results, Doob Sakenfeld does not regard חסד as a reciprocal action but rather as something based on a personal relationship or a previous act on the part of the recipient of חסד.[25]

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18   Hans Joachim Stoebe, *Gottes hingebende Güte und Treue. häsäd wä'ämät. Teil 1. Bedeutung und Geschichte des Begriffes häsäd* (unpublished doctoral thesis, Münster, 1950), p. 58. Cf. the summary of his dissertation in Hans Joachim Stoebe, 'Die Bedeutung des Wortes ḥäsäd im Alten Testament', *VT* 2 (1952), pp. 244-254.
19   Stoebe, *Gottes hingebende Güte und Treue*, pp. 19-21, 47-48, 67, 133-136.
20   Ibid., p. 115.
21   Ibid., pp. 63, 134-135. In a later publication, he even calls this an anthropomorphism transforming a human attitude into a description of God's attributes, see Hans Joachim Stoebe, 'חֶסֶד ḥesed kindness', in *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament* (ed. Ernst Jenni / Claus Westermann, trans. Mark E. Biddle, Peabody: Hendrickson, 1997), pp. 449-464, esp. 457.
22   Stoebe, *Gottes hingebende Güte und Treue*, pp. 1-2.
23   Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, *The Meaning of »Hesed« in the Hebrew Bible. A New Inquiry* (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1978), p. 14
24   Ibid., p. 24, cf. pp. 44-45.
25   Ibid., pp. 45, 53-54.

Further, she claims the same results for the theological word usage, namely that God who performs חסד has some responsibility for humans receiving חסד while at the same time being free to give it or not. This kind of חסד, too, fulfils a need that the recipient depends upon.[26] In addition to these findings, Doob Sakenfeld also postulates forgiveness as a possible element of God's חסד as is indicated by liturgical formulas like Ex. 34.6-7, Num. 14.18, and Ps. 86.15 within their respective contexts. Thus, the theological word usage, according to Doob Sakenfeld, implies an extended meaning of חסד as compared with the secular word usage.[27]

The religious use of the word is taken as referring to pious deeds of humans towards God. It can be found in post-exilic narrative literature (e.g., Neh. 13.14, 2Chr. 32.32) and in the earlier prophetic literature (e.g., Hos. 4.1, Jer. 2.2). With this sense, the plural usage of the lexeme is also possible.[28] As in the case of the secular word use, חסד is being performed due to a certain responsibility on the part of the agent. In its religious meaning, חסד can be directed towards men and towards God. In this case, the word takes a more general meaning in the sense of 'faithfulness' or 'loyalty' which is exemplified by the noun חָסִיד meaning 'faithful one'.[29]

Though Doob Sakenfeld's investigation exceeds Glueck's landmark study in terms of breadth and depth, it is lacking in several respects. First, on the linguistic side, Doob Sakenfeld fails to clearly distinguish between a lexeme's denotation and its referent in a specific context.[30] Thus, in passages like Ex. 34.6-7 or Ps. 86.15,[31] 'forgiveness' may well be what the lexeme חסד refers to, and this context-dependent referent can even shed some light on the lexeme's denotation, but this is not to be equated with its denotation. Second, it is doubtful that the categorisation of חסד according to secular, theological, and religious meaning is helpful, since it is not always an easy task to assign the use of the word in a certain context to one of these categories.[32] Further, Doob Sakenfeld rightly observes that many poetic passages simply do not provide enough information to determine the meaning of חסד in those contexts.[33] Hence, it seems more advisable to investigate the word meaning in clear contexts first and only then to apply one's findings to indistinct or even vague contexts.

In a later study that also covers aspects of personal application, Doob Sakenfeld seeks to address this methodological problem.[34] In this study, she recognises that anthropological language calls for an investigation of the lexeme's meaning first of all by means of narrative texts dealing with human agents.[35] Doob Sakenfeld admits time and again that the English word 'loyalty' (which is mentioned in the subtitle) is not fully adequate to convey the full meaning of the Hebrew lexeme חסד. She

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26   Ibid., pp. 93, 102, 107.
27   Ibid., pp. 119-125, 147-150.
28   Ibid., pp. 151-154, 169-171.
29   Ibid., pp. 152, 173, 176-180.
30   Cf. John Lyons, *Linguistic Semantics. An Introduction* (Cambridge: University Press, 1995), p. 79.
31   Doob Sakenfeld, *The Meaning of »Hesed« in the Hebrew Bible*, pp. 112-125.
32   In difficult contexts like Isa. 16.16, it is virtually impossible , and even Doob Sakenfeld has to admit the 'artificiality of strict divisions between theological, religious, and secular usage'; see ibid., pp. 205-206, cf. pp. 99-101.
33   Ibid., pp. 215. This is especially true of the liturgical formula הודו ליהוה כי טוב כי לעולם חסדו (e.g., 1Chr. 16.34), cf. ibid., pp. 165-168.
34   Katherine Doob Sakenfeld, *Faithfulness in Action. Loyalty in Biblical Perspective* (Overtures to Biblical Theology, 16; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985).
35   Ibid., pp. 3-4.

therefore expands the meaning of the English term 'loyalty' with aspects from the biblical texts.[36] On the other hand, she transfers components of the English lexeme to the meaning of the Hebrew term.[37] Hence, this later study, like the first one, lacks a sound linguistic methodology.

2.4. Gordon R. Clark (1993)

Whereas all studies mentioned so far concentrated on the lexeme חסד only, Gordon Clark's investigation provides us with a corpus based field study of several lexemes which have been derived from six roots (שׂנא – אהב – אמן – רחם – חנן – חסד). Clark investigates the meaning of חסד from two angles. First, syntagmatic relations describe the lexeme's collocations with other lexemes, i.e., common occurrences in the same context. Second, paradigmatic relations describe the lexeme's potential to be replaced in a given context by synonyms, antonyms, hyponyms and the like.[38]

Impressive computer-aided statistics over the whole corpus reveal that lexemes derived from the roots חסד and רחם are used predominantly with a divine agent and a human recipient whereas lexemes derived from אהב and שׂנא are used predominantly in contexts where both the agent and the recipient are human.[39] The lexemes' respective collocation patterns show that חסד does not denote a relationship which is based on a ברית, but rather one that is based on mutual commitment.[40] Mutual commitment is seen, in other words, as a meaning component that distinguishes חסד from lexemes derived from the root טוב.[41] Further, אמת and אמונה are 'essential components' of חסד.[42]

Clark's study presents an impressive amount of data. All results are strongly based on statistics. However, it seems doubtful whether the frequency of word usage and collocation patterns can really tell us the fundamental meaning components of a lexeme. For instance, Clark notes that lexemes derived from one of the roots חסד and רחם are used more frequently with a divine than with a human agent, as opposed to other lexemes in his set.[43] This may be an interesting fact, but its usefulness for the demarcation of the respective lexeme's meaning is quite limited.

Considering not only חסד but rather a whole group of lexemes that are possibly related in meaning to each other is an ambitious task. Clark's aim is to define the meaning of חסד by delimiting it from the meaning of other lexemes. However, since the meaning of these lexemes cannot be completely delineated, integrating them into the study does not seem to be helpful and appropriate.

2.5. Evaluation

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36   Ibid., pp. 2-3; cf., e.g., pp. 21, 24, 40, 44.
37   See ibid., p. 106: 'Loyalty by definition has to do with carrying through on commitment'.
38   Gordon R. Clark, *The Word »Hesed« in the Hebrew Bible* (JSOT.Supp, 157; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), pp. 23-25, 37-38.
39   Ibid., pp. 53-58.
40   Ibid., p. 140.
41   Ibid., p. 233.
42   Ibid., pp. 259-260.
43   Ibid., p. 139.

The aforementioned studies present a host of helpful exegetical observations. With regard to חסד, however, they all fail to give a clear and concise definition of what the lexeme's meaning really is. Investigating a presumptive 'secular meaning', i.e., confining oneself to looking at texts with human actors only, seems to be a good starting point. However, the methodological flaws mentioned above call for a sound linguistic framework which will be presented in the following section of this paper.

3. A new quest for meaning and its methodology

3.1. A cognitive-linguistic approach: Frame semantics

The last two decades have seen a growing impact of cognitive linguistics on Biblical studies.[44] Biblical scholars are becoming more and more aware that the paradigm of linguistic structuralism, forcefully advocated by James Barr in the 1960s, cannot fully grasp all the intricacies that come to the fore when one is eliciting the meaning of Biblical texts. Even individual words cannot be understood without taking cultural and social aspects of meaning into account.[45]

One of the earlier branches of cognitive linguistics, frame semantics, was developed simultaneously within different academic disciplines.[46] From the perspective of cognitive science and artificial intelligence, Marvin Minsky made the case that every kind of knowledge in the human mind is organized in so-called 'frames'.[47] Already in the 1960's, the linguist Charles Fillmore developed a 'Case Grammar' with a semantic emphasis[48] which later led to frame semantics.[49]

In cognitive linguistics, a 'frame' is defined as a cognitive structure representing a prototypical situation. Whenever a word that is part of a certain frame is used, the whole frame will be activated in the recipient's mind. Once activated, the frame provides all linguistic and extra-linguistic information that is necessary for understanding the utterance. Fillmore's favourite example is the frame 'commercial event'. If someone uses the English verb 'to buy' as part of an utterance, the frame 'commercial event' will provide the following information:

- The act of buying (or selling, respectively) usually takes place between a seller and a buyer.

- While the former owns the goods that are part of the exchange, the latter owns the financial resources necessary for buying them.

- The amount of money flowing from the buyer to the seller, specified by the price, normally corresponds to the value of the goods.

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44   See, e.g., Ellen van Wolde, *Reframing Biblical Studies. When Language and Text Meet Culture, Cognition, and Context* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2009).
45   Cf. van Wolde, *Reframing Biblical Studies*, 51-60.
46   Dietrich Busse, *Frame-Semantik. Ein Kompendium* (Berlin / Boston: de Gruyter, 2012), p. 11.
47   Marvin Minsky, 'A Framework for Representing Knowledge', in Patrick H. Winston (ed.), *The Psychology of Computer Vision* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1975), p. 212.
48   Charles J. Fillmore, 'The Case for Case', in Emmon Bach / Robert T. Harms (eds.), *Universals in Linguistic Theory* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston: 1968), pp. 1–88.
49   Charles J. Fillmore, 'Frame Semantics and the Nature of Language', *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 280 (1976), pp. 20-32.

Hence, even if all this encyclopaedic information is not made explicit within the utterance, it is provided by the 'commercial event' frame as soon as any of the words 'buy', 'sell', 'price', 'goods' etc. are used.[50] Obviously, frames are highly dependent on the culture of the actual language users. The above-mentioned example of the 'commercial event' frame corresponds more to a Western culture than to an African or a Near Eastern one where bargaining practices may be an essential part of any commercial event (cf. Gen. 23).

From a more formalistic perspective, frames are supposed to contain 'slots'. Slots are argument places for specific pieces of information like 'buyer', 'seller', 'price', and so on. Particular instances of slots are called 'fillers' and are taken from actual utterances or texts.[51] The interplay of slots and fillers can be shown by means of an example: When somebody uses the utterance 'Yesterday, I bought a new car' the frame 'commercial event' will be evoked in the recipient's mind. Thus, it is immediately clear that there are several slots, namely 'buyer', 'seller', 'goods', and 'price'. The 'buyer' slot is filled with the person here referred to by the personal pronoun 'I', whereas 'a new car' is the filler for the slot 'goods'. On the other hand, nothing has been said about the seller and the price, whether a car salesman and a steep price or a private citizen and a bargain offer. However, even if these slots are not filled, their mere existence tells us that in the real-life event, the existence of a seller and a price are assumed. Therefore, since the verb 'to buy' is part of the 'commercial event' frame, its meaning presupposes that certain players, entities and constraints exist, irrespective of their being mentioned in actual texts or utterances.

Frame semantics may prove to be a promising way to investigate the designation of Biblical Hebrew lexemes.[52] It demands, of course, that we explore the world behind the Biblical texts. So far, frame semantics has sparsely been applied to Biblical studies. One of the few examples is Stephen Shead's dissertation which is devoted to the investigation of חקר and similar lexemes which are assigned to one of the frames EXPLORE, SEARCH, and SEEK.[53] Quite recently, Christian Stettler has used frame semantics in New Testament studies, showing that the apostle Paul probably had a complete mental frame of the concept 'Final Judgement', even if not a single Biblical text provides all relevant pieces of information.[54]

In what follows, I will employ frame semantics to describe the meaning of the Hebrew lexeme חסד. To that end, I will reconstruct a possible frame for events that חסד is used to describe. It is presumed that this frame was probably active in the minds of the language users who produced the Biblical texts.

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50   Fillmore, 'Frame Semantics and the Nature of Language', p. 25; Charles J. Fillmore, 'Frame Semantics', in The Linguistic Society of Korea (ed.), *Linguistics in the Morning Calm* (Seoul: Hanshin, 1982), pp. 111-137, esp. 116-117, 122.

51   Cf. Charles J. Fillmore, 'Frames and the Semantics of Understanding', *Quaderni di semantica* 6 (1985), pp. 222-254, esp. 234; Minsky, 'A Framework for Representing Knowledge', p. 212.

52   There is some semantic overlap between the technical terms 'denotation' and 'designation', cf. Bussmann, *Routledge Dictionary of Language and Linguistics*, s.v. denotation. In cognitive linguistics, the term 'designation' is preferred to refer to the meaning of a linguistic unit in a certain cognitive domain.

53   Stephen L. Shead, *Radical Frame Semantics and Biblical Hebrew. Exploring Lexical Semantics* (BIS, 108; Leiden / Boston: Brill, 2011).

54   Christian Stettler, *Das Endgericht bei Paulus. Framesemantische und exegetische Studien zur paulinischen Eschatologie und Soterologie* (WUNT, 371; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017).

3.2. How to reconstruct the חסד frame

Unfortunately, in the case of Biblical lexicography word meanings cannot be determined by eliciting them from mother-tongue speakers. According to Wilhelm Gesenius, the main source of Hebrew lexicography is Old Testament language use itself, i.e., the usage of words in their respective contexts.[55] Since the redaction history of the Old Testament texts is not uniformly agreed upon[56] I am using an approach that is basically synchronic. However, I do distinguish between texts which are generally considered as belonging to Classical Biblical Hebrew (CBH), and texts which are not.[57] Words used in Late Biblical Hebrew (LBH) texts are more likely to have undergone some semantic change through interference with Aramaic and other languages.[58] In order to avoid having to cope with these phenomena, I am concentrating here on CBH texts.

It is safe to assume that knowledge about the 'secular' use of חסד will enhance our understanding of its 'theological' use. This becomes immediately clear if we consider metaphorical language. Knowledge of the source domain will allow for the right understanding of the metaphorical expression in the target domain.[59] Understanding the characterisation of God as a 'rock' (e.g., Ps. 28.1) is possible if and only if recipients have some knowledge about real rocks. Calling God a 'rock' implies that a rock's attributes of firmness and steadiness and hence its protective function can be ascribed to God.[60] Similarly, in poetic texts, חסד is often used as an attribute of God's character (cf., e.g., Ps. 136.1: הודו ליהוה כי־טוב כי לעולם חסדו). In contrast, narrative texts generally provide more information about what חסד actually meant to people. It is to be expected that these texts explain the meaning of the lexeme in the course of their story-line. In CBH texts, the lexeme חסד is used predominantly as a direct object of the verb עשׂה, referring to a concrete event in the immediate context. However, if a concrete referent of the lexeme חסד is not provided in its actual context, the text in question is not suitable for reconstructing the חסד frame.

Moreover, since frame semantics presupposes mental frames as representing prototypical situations, it is advisable to employ texts which describe everyday situations. That's why we are primarily searching for texts with a human agent of a חסד event.

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55   Gesenius, 'Von den Quellen der hebräischen Wortforschung', p. vii.
56   See, e.g., for the Pentateuch, Jan C. Gertz et al., 'Convergence and Divergence in Pentateuchal Theory', in Jan C. Gertz et al., *The Formation of the Pentateuch. Bridging the Academic Cultures of Europe, Israel, and North America* (FAT, 111; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), pp. 1-7.
57   Cf. Aaron Hornkohl, 'Biblical Hebrew: Periodization', in Geoffrey Khan (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Hebrew Language and Linguistics* (Leiden / Boston: Brill, 2013), vol. 1, pp. 315-325.
58   Avi Hurvitz, 'Biblical Hebrew, Late', in Geoffrey Khan (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Hebrew Language and Linguistics* (Leiden / Boston: Brill, 2013), vol. 1, pp. 329-338, esp. 331-334. It should be noted that the much-quoted chronological explanations of linguistic diversity in the Hebrew Bible have raised some objections. For a different approach which explains linguistic diversity rather by assuming different literary styles, see, e.g., Ian Young / Robert Rezetko / Martin Ehrensvärd, *Linguistic Dating of Biblical Texts* (2 vols.; London: Equinox, 2008), esp. vol. 1: pp. 195-200, vol. 2: pp. 72-105.
59   William Croft / D. Alan Cruse, *Cognitive Linguistics* (Cambridge Textbooks in Linguistics; Cambridge: University Press, 2004), pp. 193-198.
60   Cf. Adam S. van der Woude, 'צור *sûr* rock', in Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament (eds. Ernst Jenni / Claus Westermann, trans. Mark E. Biddle, Peabody: Hendrickson, 1997), pp. 1067-1071.

Summing up, we are generally working with CBH narrative texts describing humans who perform what is called חסד. However, these characteristics are not meant to be absolute criteria, rather, we are merely giving priority to texts fulfilling them. As soon as a putative חסד frame has been established, it is to be expected that it will shed light on texts which are less clear with regard to the meaning of חסד.

4. What the חסד frame looks like: Results

In this section, I will first present a hypothetical חסד frame, followed by a description of its syntactic realisation. The frame has been reconstructed from the relevant source texts (4.1). Afterwards, I will corroborate my hypothesis of the frame's structure with reference to some of the texts in question (4.2). This is followed by a short definition of the lexeme's meaning (4.3). Finally, I will apply the frame to some texts which contain the lexeme חסד without a distinct reference. In doing so, it will become evident that such texts can be illuminated by the application of frame semantics (4.4).

4.1. The reconstructed frame and its syntactic realisation

According to the insights of cognitive linguistics, frame structures exist in the minds of language users. They represent prototypical situations and can normally be investigated with the help of mother-tongue speakers. When working in a 'dead' language, one has to investigate suitable texts, i.e., texts which provide as much information about the situation in question as possible.

My proposal for a חסד frame is depicted below. It has been reconstructed from quite a number of narrative texts belonging to the corpus of Classical Biblical Hebrew which has further been restricted to texts with a human agent of חסד.

Frame: חסד event	
Slots: Fillers:	
A: Agentive, +human :	
B: Benefactive, +human :	
D: Danger / Risk :	
Constraints:	
B is in danger or experiences a critical impairment (D)	
B is not able to avert D	
A is able and willing to avert D from B	

In many languages, nouns can designate not only objects but also actions.[61] The fact that חסד is mostly used in collocation with the verb עשה suggests that the noun designates an action or an event, rather than an attitude.[62] In the original context of Fillmore's Case Grammar, the labels 'Agentive' and 'Benefactive' represent semantic roles within a sentence.[63] Here, they are referring to the 'players' within a חסד situation. For the time being, both players A and B are regarded as humans since we are dealing with prototypical situations. In certain texts, of course, God is the agent of חסד. This phenomenon can be considered a metaphorical extension of the regular pattern which is also covered by the frame definition just given. The primary aim of denoting these players as humans is to preclude the idea that, e.g., חסד can be accorded to an inanimate object, or that an animal is the agent of חסד. It is noteworthy that the slot D (Danger / Risk) is essential to the חסד frame. Most narrative texts containing the lexeme חסד strongly indicate, either directly or within the nearer or wider context, that the benefactive is threatened by a critical impairment (see section 4.2). This suggests that some danger was present in the recipients minds whenever the word חסד was used. Even if no danger or risk is mentioned in a text as in the examples presented in section 4.4, the whole frame nevertheless applies. Although the D slot remains without any filler in these cases, some danger (which remains unspecified in the text) is implied. The core idea of my hypothesis is that a real or felt danger is part of the meaning of חסד, not a kind of loyalty or covenant as Glueck proposed.[64]

The following two patterns describe the most frequent syntactic realisations of the frame. The symbols A and B denote the slots 'Agentive' and 'Benefactive', respectively. In a concrete text, fillers for the A and B slots occur, i.e., lexical representations of people in the extra-linguistic world.

	Pattern	Example
1.	ʿaśah (A, ḥæsæd) ʿim (B)	ועשית־נא עמדי חסד 'and please do חסד with me' (Gen. 40.14)
2.	ḥæsæd + SUFFIX (A)	ולא תכרת חסדך 'do not cut off your חסד' (1Sam. 20.15)

Some remarks concerning these syntactic patterns are in order:

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61   Alan Cruse, *Meaning in Language. An Introduction to Semantics and Pragmatics* (3rd ed.; Oxford Textbooks in Linguistics; Oxford: University Press, 2015), pp. 269-270. This fact has been observed in the domain of Bible translation where it deserves special attention; see Eugene A. Nida, *Toward a Science of Translating* (Leiden: Brill, 1964), pp. 59-69.

62   Cf. Hans-Jürgen Zobel, 'חֶסֶד ḥesed̠', in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (ed. G. Johannes Botterweck / Helmer Ringgren / Heinz-Josef Fabry, trans. John T. Willis et al., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), vol. 5, pp. 44-64, esp. 46-51, 54-56.

63   Fillmore, 'The Case for Case', pp. 24-25, 31-32.

64   Glueck, *Das Wort »ḥesed«*, pp. 3, 12-13, 20-21.

1. In the first pattern, the verb עשׂה is used with the preposition עם. According to its valency,[65] the verb carries two arguments, namely, the lexical realisation of the agentive as the subject and the lexeme חסד as the direct object. The preposition עם is followed by a realisation of the benefactive. Both of the slots A and B are filled. Apart from the fact that different verbs can be used with חסד as an object (cf., e.g., 1Ki. 3.6: וַתִּשְׁמָר־לוֹ אֶת־הַחֶסֶד הַגָּדוֹל הַזֶּה), עשׂה is by far the most prominent one, denoting the concrete act of performing חסד. Among the prepositions indicating the Benefactive, עם is the most frequent one. As for the other prepositions used (על, ל, and את), no difference in meaning could be observed in the respective contexts.

2. In the basic form of the second pattern, only the A slot is filled. The agent of חסד is expressed by the pronominal suffix of the noun חסד, thus, the suffix expresses a subjective genitive. Any verb taking חסד with its suffix as an object gives further information about an act of חסד but is not part of the frame. Any possible filler of the B slot has to be deduced from the context.

3. It is possible to combine the second pattern with part of the first one by adding a prepositional phrase, thus filling the B slot as well, e.g., זֶה חַסְדְּךָ אֶת־רֵעֶךָ ('This is your חסד with your friend', 2Sam. 16.17).

4.2. Illustrations of the חסד frame

Obviously, it is not possible to discuss each and every text that has been used to reconstruct the חסד frame. Nevertheless, it is assumed that the following notes can show that our reconstruction of the frame is plausible. In the frame diagrams below, not only the frame's slots and their fillers are depicted but also the referent of חסד is given, i.e. the act or event in the extra-linguistic world that the lexeme in the text refers to.

Example 1: וְעָשִׂיתָ־נָּא עִמָּדִי חֶסֶד ('Do חסד to me', Gen. 40.14)

In this passage, Joseph is asking the cupbearer, his fellow-prisoner, for an act of חסד. The text which immediately follows elaborates on what this act involves: וְהִזְכַּרְתַּנִי אֶל־פַּרְעֹה וְהוֹצֵאתַנִי מִן־הַבַּיִת הַזֶּה ('mention me to Pharao and get me out of this house'). Thus, the person of the cupbearer fills the agentive slot (A), Joseph fills the benefactive slot (B). The danger (D) consists in staying in prison forever without any chance of a fair trial. Putting the fillers into the frame's slots results in the following:

Frame: חסד event, Gen. 40.14
(constraints on slots according to חסד frame in section 4.1)
Slots: Fillers:

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65   Cf. Michael Malessa, 'Valency', in Geoffrey Khan (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Hebrew Language and Linguistics* (Leiden / Boston: Brill, 2013), vol. 3, pp. 893-896.

A: Agentive, +human	:	cupbearer
B: Benefactive, +human	:	Joseph
D: Danger / Risk	:	Joseph stays and probably dies in prison
referent of חסד	:	cupbearer gets Joseph out of prison by mentioning him to Pharao

Example 2: זה חסדך אשר תעשׂה עמדי ('This is your חסד that you shall do to me', Gen. 20.13)

In the context of this passage, Abraham asks his wife Sarah to tell the Philistines of Gerar that he is her brother (v.13b: אמרי־לי אחי הוא) because he fears the Philistines would kill him to get hold of Sarah (cf. v.11). This example shows that the act of חסד is not necessarily performed by the stronger partner of a relationship which would probably be Abraham. Rather, it is the situational stronger partner, in this context Sarah, who performs an act of חסד.[66] Abraham depends on her compliance in order to avert the danger he feels.[67] Here is what the frame including its fillers looks like:

Frame: חסד event, Gen. 20.13		
(constraints on slots according to חסד frame in section 4.1)		
Slots:		Fillers:
A: Agentive, +human	:	Sarah
B: Benefactive, +human	:	Abraham
D: Danger / Risk	:	Philistines kill Abraham to get hold of his wife (Gen. 20.11)
referent of חסד	:	Sarah tells the Philistines that Abraham is her brother, thus precluding their need to kill him

Example 3: כחסד אשר־עשׂיתי עמך עמך תעשׂה עמדי ('according to the חסד I have done to you you shall do to me', Gen. 21.23)

In this passage, Abimelek asks for Abraham's חסד and reminds him of his own act of חסד to Abraham. Here, we have two concrete examples of חסד and, hence, two sets of fillers for the frame. First, we will look at the חסד Abimelek is asking Abraham for. The Philistine king feels threatened by Abraham and this sentiment is obviously due to the fact that Abraham has become rich and powerful (v.22: אלהים עמך בכל אשר־אתה עשׂה). Therefore, Abimelek asks Abraham to swear that he will not deal falsely with him (v.23: אם־תשׁקר לי). Abraham is in the stronger position, and that is what frightens Abimelek.[68] Abimelek senses a potential danger, namely, that Abraham could start a

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66   The imperative אמרי most probably communicates a request, not a command, and is similar to the 'polite" form אמרי־נא in the parallel text Gen. 12.13; cf. Christo H.J. van der Merwe et al., *A Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), pp. 167, 171; Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis. Chapters 18-50* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), p. 69.
67   Cf. Doob Sakenfeld, *The Meaning of »Hesed« in the Hebrew Bible*, p. 27.
68   Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis. Chapters 18-50*, pp. 88-89.

war, and this risk seems real since God is on Abrahams side. Again, the agentive is not forced to do חסד nor is there any kind of obligation toward the benefactive.

Frame: חסד event, Gen. 21.23: תעשה עמדי		
(constraints on slots according to חסד frame in section 4.1)		
Slots:		Fillers:
A: Agentive, +human	:	Abraham
B: Benefactive, +human	:	Abimelek
D: Danger / Risk	:	Abraham makes war to Abimelek and defeats him
referent of חסד	:	no hostility of Abraham, peaceful coexistence

The second instance of the frame (which is actually the first as per the sequence of speech) has to be filled with data from past events. It describes Abimelek's former act of חסד towards Abraham. The expression כחסד אשר־עשיתי עמך probably refers back to the events of Gen. 20. Here Abimelek was the stronger one who accused Abraham of cheating on him (Gen. 20.9-10). But instead of killing him and keeping Sarah he gave her back and presented Abraham with precious gifts (Gen. 20.14-16).[69] Although the lexeme חסד does not occur in Gen. 20 (except for Sarah's act of חסד towards Abraham in v.13, cf. above) this is exactly what the word usage in Gen. 21.23 refers to:

Frame: חסד event, Gen. 21.23: כחסד אשר־עשיתי עמך		
(constraints on slots according to חסד frame in section 4.1)		
Slots:		Fillers:
A: Agentive, +human	:	Abimelek
B: Benefactive, +human	:	Abraham
D: Danger / Risk	:	Abimelek kills Abraham and keeps Sarah
referent of חסד	:	Abimelek returns Sarah to Abraham, bestows gifts on him, and grants him habitation in his land

The following table presents more examples from our corpus. For each case of a חסד event, the fillers of the slots A, B, and D are given, as well as a short description of what the lexeme חסד refers to. It should be kept in mind that the constraints given in section 4.1 apply to all instances of the frame with all possible fillers. Hence, D always represents a danger or a critical impairment that cannot be averted by B alone, and A is always presumed to be able and willing to perform the respective act of חסד.

	Agentive	Benefactive	Danger / Risk	referent of חסד

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69   Ibid., p. 89.

Gen. 24.49	Rebekka's family	Abraham	no posterity	family gives Rebekka to Isaac in marriage
Gen. 39.21	prison warden	Joseph	bad life in prison, possibly death	Joseph is assigned a task and receives honour
Gen. 47.29	Joseph	Jacob	connection with promised land broken	Joseph buries Jacob in Canaan
Josh. 2.12	Rahab	spies	spies discovered and killed	Rahab hides spies
Josh. 2.12,14	spies	Rahab	Rahab and her family killed	Israelites spare Rahab and her family
Judg. 1.24	spies	man from Bethel	man from Bethel and his family killed	Israelites spare man from Bethel and his family
Judg. 8.35	Israelites	Gideon's descendants	Gideon's descendants killed because of rivalry	Israelites honour descendants of former leader[70]
1Sam. 20.8	Jonathan	David	David killed by Saul	Jonathan protects David
1Sam. 20.14,15	David	Jonathan	Jonathan and his descendants killed by David in order to strengthen his own dynasty	David spares and protects Jonathan and his descendants
2Sam. 3.8	Abner	Ish-Bosheth, Saul's descendants	Saul's descendants killed by David in order to strengthen his own dynasty	Abner protects Saul's descendants
2Sam. 9.1,3,7	David	Saul's descendants, Mephibosheth	impoverishment, probably lack of honour	David return Saul's possession to Mephibosheth and honours him
2Sam. 16.17	Hushai	David	Absalom usurps power and kills David	Hushai stays with David, serving as adviser[71]

4.3. A short definition of חסד

We are now in a position to offer a concise definition of the lexeme חסד. This definition follows directly from the description of the חסד frame given in section 4.1.

> חסד (noun) – an action performed by one person for the benefit of another to avert some danger or critical impairment from the beneficiary.

This definition states what חסד unequivocally designates – no more and not less. It does not provide any information as to whether the agentive is obliged to perform חסד or not. Over against the studies mentioned in section 2, it is likely that this short definition is fully sufficient to describe the

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70   This is a hypothetical referent of חסד, as the text states that the Israelites did *not* do חסד to Gideon's descendants. Hence, the danger has become real.
71   This is a hypothetical referent of חסד, as Hushai (seemingly) defects to Absalom.

meaning of the lexeme. As opposed to the dictionary entries quoted in section 1, it seems very clear that חסד designates a concrete action, rather than an attitude or a disposition of character.

4.4. Unravelling puzzling texts: What is חסד ?

In cognitive linguistics, it is assumed that frames are mental structures which are active during speech production and reception. Each time a word is used, the frame it belongs to is activated, providing a plethora of extra-linguistic information which is necessary to fully understand the word: words evoke frames.[72]

Having reconstructed a frame for חסד events which contains slots for an agentive, a benefactive, and a prospective danger, we can assume that this frame was evoked each time language users of Biblical Hebrew used the word חסד, even when neither the persons involved nor the danger foreseen were mentioned. Hence, we can apply the frame to passages where Biblical writers used the word without providing us with so much information as in the passages of section 4.1. The following five examples show that a frame-semantic approach can indeed advance our understanding of Biblical texts.

1Ki. 20.31: הנה־נא שמענו כי מלכי בית ישראל כי־מלכי חסד הם

'See now, we have heard that the kings of Israel are indeed[73] kings of חסד.'

In the context of this passage, the Aramaeans have been defeated by the Israelites. Their king Ben-Hadad, who is hiding from the Israelite army, receives the advice that the kings of Israel are kings of חסד. Traditionally, the construct chain מלכי חסד is interpreted as denoting a genitive of quality, resulting in an adjectival translation like 'merciful kings'.[74] While this interpretation of the genitive is most probably correct, the meaning of חסד in this passage deserves further investigation. If חסד is a quality of these kings, what does this entail? Our frame semantic analysis indicates that, since the lexeme חסד is being used, there has to be an agentive, a benefactive and a danger. As חסד is a quality of certain kings, it is to be assumed that these kings fill the agentive slot (A). The situational context tells us that the Aramaeans fear for their lives; hence, in the general statement any defeated king or people fills the benefactive slot (B). The danger (D) implicitly referred to by evoking the חסד frame is the likelihood of being killed by the victorious king. Thus, the lexeme חסד refers to not being killed by the victorious king although custom and actual situation would probably allow for it (cf. 1Ki. 22.29-38). 'Kings of חסד' are not 'merciful' or 'kind' kings as some Bible translations put it but rather kings who perform acts of חסד, i.e., who actively avert danger from people who cannot help themselves.

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72 Cf. Fillmore, 'Frames and the Semantics of Understanding', p. 232.
73 The second instance of כי is probably asseverative, cf. GKC § 159ee.
74 Paul Joüon / Takamitsu Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew* (SB, 14; Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1991), § 129f.

Prov. 11.17: גמל נפשו איש חסד ועכר שארו אכזרי

'A man of חסד is one who nurtures himself, but a cruel one troubles his (own) flesh.'

Proverbial expressions present particular difficulties due to the fact that they state universally valid observations without providing a situational context.[75] If we assume, however, that חסד has the same designation as in the texts examined so far, then we can apply our findings to this passage. Since חסד is 'an action performed by one person for the benefit of another to avert some danger or critical impairment from the beneficiary' (cf. section 4.3) and since no concrete danger or putative beneficiary is mentioned in the context we can assume that a איש חסד is somebody who habitually averts any critical impairment from other people. The first half of this proverb simply states that, by helping others, such people 'nurture themselves'.[76]

Hos. 6.6: כי חסד חפצתי ולא־זבח ודעת אלהים מעלות

'For I desire חסד and not sacrifice, and knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.'

One of the key questions concerning this difficult passage is how to reconcile the first half of the verse with the second half. Does the parallelism as a whole state an absolute degradation of sacrifices claiming that they are completely worthless (based on the negation ולא in the first half)? Or does it just assert that God prefers חסד and knowledge of God over these cultic activities (based on the preposition מן in the second half)?[77] Whatever the case, for our purposes it is more important to elucidate the meaning of חסד. Since no referent is provided, we can apply the frame that was introduced in section 4.1 and the definition given in section 4.3. Hence, what God desires more than – or rather than – sacrifices is actions (provided by some A) to the benefit of some person or group of people (whoever B might be) who are in danger or are experiencing a critical impairment (whatever D might be) and who cannot avert this danger themselves. This interpretation of Hos. 6.6 is contrary to most of the commentaries translating חסד with lexemes denoting attitudes like 'mercy',[78] 'loyalty',[79] 'steadfast love',[80] 'covenant attitude',[81] or 'dedication'.[82] Our frame-semantic analysis points out, first, that חסד designates an action rather than an attitude, and second, that this action is directed towards men and not towards God.[83] The idea that חסד should be directed towards

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75   Cf. Stoebe, 'חֶסֶד ḥesed kindness', pp. 455.
76   A similar interpretation can be given for the אנשי־חסד in Isa. 57.1.
77   The discussion is summarised by Eberhard Bons, 'Osée 6:6 dans le texte massorétique', in id., »Car c'est l'amour qui me plaît, non le sacrifice ...« Recherches sur Osée 6:6 et son interprétation juive et chrétienne (JSJ.Supp, 88; Leiden / Boston: Brill, 2004), pp. 9-24.
78   Francis I. Andersen / David N. Freedman, Hosea (AB, 24; New York: Doubleday, 1986), pp. 426, 430; Duane A. Garrett, Hosea. Joel (NAC, 19A; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1997), p. 160.
79   Douglas Stuart, Hosea–Jonah (WBC, 31; Dallas: Word, 1987), pp. 97, 110.
80   J. Andrew Dearman, The Book of Hosea (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), pp. 189, 196.
81   Hans Walter Wolff, Dodekapropheton 1: Hosea (BK, 14/1; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1961), p. 132.
82   Jörg Jeremias, Der Prophet Hosea (ATD, 24/1; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983), p. 79.
83   Cf., similarly, Clark, The Word »Hesed« in the Hebrew Bible, p. 196.

God since the parallel expression דעת אלהים is directed towards God[84] seems unlikely because of the groundwork presented in section 4.1 and 4.2 of this paper.[85]

As a corollary, a short reflection on a New Testament passage deserves mentioning: Jesus' Great Commandment (Mk. 12.29-31) combines Deu. 6.5 and Lev. 19.18. This combination mirrors the two tablets of the Decalogue and has precursors in traditions of Second Temple Judaism (e.g., Philo, Spec. 2.63); nevertheless it is assumed that the substance of this double commandment of love goes back to Jesus himself.[86] The scribe who originally asked Jesus about the greatest commandment states that loving God and loving one's neighbour is more important than burnt offerings and sacrifices (Mk. 12.33). While it is generally conceded that this passage echoes 1Sam. 15.22 and Hos. 6.6,[87] we can now add another observation: Given that חסד designates what we think it designates we can assume that חסד in Hos. 6.6 corresponds to Lev. 19.18 ('love your neighbour', i.e., 'help him whenever he is in need or danger') while דעת אלהים in the same passage corresponds to Deu. 6.5. Hence, Hos. 6.6 provides not only the tradition lying behind the scribe's statement in Mk. 12.33 but also constitutes a precursor for the Great Commandment itself.

Ex. 34.6: יהוה יהוה אל רחום וחנון ארך אפים ורב־חסד ואמת

'Yahwe, Yahwe, compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger and rich in חסד and faithfulness.'

This passage with its parallels[88] has been termed 'grace formula' and has been suggested as a possible 'centre' of Old Testament theology.[89] It presents God's character using, i.a., the lexeme חסד. When applying the חסד frame to this passage we are facing a problem similar to the one of Prov. 11.27. Neither a specific benefactive is mentioned nor a danger. The only thing we know is that God must be the agentive since he is being presented as 'rich in חסד'. With the premises of frame semantics, however, we can assume that God is presented here as somebody who (habitually) does acts of חסד to the benefit of anybody who is in the need of it, thus, God provides help in critical situations.

We should not ignore the fact that our frame definition in section 4.1 presupposes a human agentive. The reason is that frame semantics assumes prototypical situations which represent a mental frame (see above, section 3.1). That's why our frame definition was generated by texts describing situations that are as ordinary as possible and without including transcendental interventions. Let us now assume that a mother-tongue speaker of Biblical Hebrew hears or reads the statement of Ex.

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84   Alluded to by Doob Sakenfeld, *The Meaning of »Hesed« in the Hebrew Bible*, pp. 172-174 (without devoting herself to it).
85   A similar interpretation seems appropriate for Hos. 6.4 and 4.1. In Hos. 2.21 God can be the agentive if ב is instrumental (cf. Stuart, *Hosea–Jonah*, p. 59). For the extended use of חסד with God as the agentive see below on Ex. 34.6.
86   See, e.g., Udo Schnelle, *Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), pp. 119-120; Mark L. Strauss, *Mark* (ZECNT; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), pp. 542-543; Eckard J. Schnabel, *Mark* (TNTC; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2017), pp. 302-303.
87   Strauss, *Mark*, p. 544; Schnabel, *Mark*, p. 303; Craig A. Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20* (WBC, 34B; Nashville: Nelson, 2001), p. 265.
88   Ps. 86.15, 103.8, 145.8, Joel 2.13, Jona 4.2, and Neh. 9.17.
89   Hermann Spieckermann, '»Barmherzig und gnädig ist der Herr ...«', *ZAW* 102 (1990), pp. 1-18, esp. 3, 18.

34.6. What mental processes are necessary to understand this statement? Since the lexeme חסד is used the חסד frame is evoked. Although the frame slots are only sparsely filled, it becomes clear that חסד is unthinkable without a benefactive and a danger. Concrete situations where acts of חסד are performed come to mind, e.g. the cupbearer speaking up for Joseph at Pharao's court saving him from death in prison, or David inviting poor and dishonoured Mephibosheth to his royal table. Thus, a mental image develops that shapes the Hebrew speaker's conception of what חסד involves. This image can now be projected onto the statement about God: He is, according to Ex. 34.6, somebody who acts the same way towards people as David acted towards Mephibosheth.

Isa. 40.6: כל־הבשר חציר וכל־חסדו כציץ השדה

'All flesh is grass and all its חסד is like a flower in the field.'

The Septuagint translation offering δόξα (ἀνθρώπου) for חסד has probably not only influenced the understanding of this passage but also the understanding of the Hebrew lexeme itself. Section 1 has shown that dictionaries like BDB and DCH assume the distinctive meaning 'loving appearance', or 'beauty', respectively. Since this meaning deviates considerably from the other options provided by the dictionary entries, and since Isa. 40.6 seems to be the only passage where חסד takes this putative meaning, it is appropriate to search for different solutions.

Some commentators emend the text to הֲדָרוֹ ('its beauty') to obtain the presumptive *Vorlage* of the LXX translation.[90] The pre-masoretic consonantal text, however, is supported by the large Isaiah scroll from Qumran (1QIsaᵃ), which has the plural form חסדיו. Other scholars assume that חסד has the additional meaning 'strength'. This view is based on the Targum which offers תקפהון in Isa. 40.6, and on some passages like Ps. 144.2, 59.17 where חסד is paralleled with expressions of strength.[91] Still others prefer a 'traditional' translation of חסד like 'loyalty' or 'faithfulness' avoiding any emendation.[92]

The latter approach shows that neither emendations nor the assumption of polysemy or homonymy for חסד is necessary to understand the text. As for the meaning of חסד in this passage, we can now try to apply our previous findings. First, the 3ʳᵈ person suffix provides information about the agentive. It refers back to 'all flesh', that is, by way of metonymy, all mankind or, according to the second half of v.7,[93] the people of Israel. We have no indication whatsoever of a benefactive and a danger, thus, there are no fillers for these slots. Nevertheless, we can assume that חסד refers to any action performed by any human (or by any Israelite) that averts a situation of danger or critical impairment from somebody else. The second half of Isa. 40.6 states that all humans are like grass

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90   Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 40-55* (AB, 19A; New York: Doubleday, 2002), p. 178; Bernhard Duhm, *Das Buch Jesaja* (2ⁿᵈ ed.; HK.AT, 3.1; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1902), p. 260.
91   Charles F. Whitley, 'The Semantic Range of *Ḥesed*', *Bib* 62 (1981), pp. 519-526; Lester J. Kuyper, 'The meaning of חסדו Isa. XL 6', *VT* 13 (1963), pp. 489-492; Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40-66* (2ⁿᵈ ed.; NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), p. 34; Karl Elliger, *Deuterojesaja* (BK.AT, 11.1; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1978), p. 3.
92   John D.W. Watts, *Isaiah 34-66* (WBC, 25; Waco: Word, 1987), p. 78; Klaus Baltzer, *Deutero-Jesaja* (KAT, 10.2; Gütersloh: Gütersloher, 1999), pp. 90-91; Jan L. Koole, *Isaiah Vol. 3.1: Isaiah 40-48* (HCOT; Kampen: Kok, 1997), p. 66.
93   The words אכן חציר העם are usually seen as a gloss, cf. Watts, *Isaiah 34-66*, p. 78.

and that all human acts of חסד are like the flowers in the field. The meaning of this passage is thus very similar to the meaning of Hos. 6.4 ('your חסד is like the morning mist and like the early dew that disappears').[94]

5. Conclusions and further prospects

Dictionaries usually fail to provide sufficient information concerning the exact meaning of the Biblical Hebrew lexeme חסד. Several book-length studies on this topic exist; however, the results are not convincing and a sound linguistic methodology is still lacking. Cognitive linguistics, particularly frame semantics, provides a promising approach to fill this gap.

Within the limits of this study, a cognitive frame for חסד has been reconstructed. Its plausibility has been verified by several passages from the Hebrew Bible. Agreeably, the frame helped to elucidate a few puzzling texts. The short definition from section 4.3 is meant as a working hypothesis that can serve as the basis for further lexicographical research on חסד.[95] One major result of this investigation is that the lexeme חסד designates a concrete action, rather than an attitude or a disposition of character. As opposed to earlier dictionary entries it is neither necessary to distinguish between a human and a divine agent nor to postulate a special word meaning for the plural form חסדים.[96] Generally, dictionaries of Biblical Hebrew ought to provide their users not only with a couple of translation equivalents but also with a verbal definition of the lexeme in question, as simple translation equivalents tend to be misleading, to say the least.

Nevertheless, some remarks about translating חסד into English are in order. If we had to choose from the English lexemes that are given in the dictionary entries quoted in section 1, "kindness" would be the best choice. In certain contexts, "kindness" can in fact refer to an action (as in "Thank you for your kindness"). It has to be noted, however, that solutions based on this lexeme can be misleading. E.g., translating the construct chain מלכי חסד (1Ki. 20.31) with „kind kings" could imply a connotation of mere affability. In order to communicate the existence of a danger or an impairment within the חסד frame, it is perhaps advisable to search for solutions based on the root "help" (like "kind, helping action"). It has to be conceded, though, that such renderings can be cumbersome.

Since Glueck's study, researchers have tended to distinguish between the secular, religious, and theological usage of חסד. In contrast, frame semantics presupposes prototypical situations which are represented by a mental frame. Thus, even though a word is used with respect to a divine agent, the normal frame drawn from an everyday situation will still be evoked. God's חסד is understood if and only if human חסד is understood. Hence, we are suggesting that Biblical texts that describe חסד acts performed by a human agent are needed to understand passages about God's חסד. Talking about

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94   Cf. Doob Sakenfeld, *The Meaning of »Hesed« in the Hebrew Bible*, p. 192; Stoebe, *Gottes hingebende Güte und Treue*, p. 101 (with different interpretations of חסד).
95   It would be necessary to look at every passage in the Hebrew Bible that contains the lexeme חסד in order to offer a definitive thesis.
96   The construct chain with חסדי (Isa. 55.3; 2Chr. 6.42) seems to express an objective genitive whereas the plural form with a pronominal suffix (Neh. 13.14; Isa. 40.6 in 1QIsaᵃ) denotes a subjective genitive.

God's חסד is a kind of metaphorical language that is informed by what people know about human חסד.

In order to further advance our understanding of the lexeme's meaning, it is necessary to delimit it from other lexemes with a similar meaning. It would be promising to investigate the differences between חסד and ישועה, חן, and רחמים, respectively. In Ex. 34.6, Yahwe is characterised by means of the nouns חסד and אמת, as well as the adjectives רחום and חנון. Further research on חסד and related lexemes, based on sound linguistic methodology, will no doubt enhance our understanding of God's attributes as they are presented in the Hebrew Bible.