

To Whom is Compassion Shown Exodus 33:19

Introduction:

To whom do we typically show compassion?

Would it not be those to whom we have an emotional connection or an intellectual intent?

People who are close to us, family, friends, or fellow workers are shown compassion.

The fatherless and orphans usually are shown compassion.

The sick, the spiritually sick, and strangers often receive compassion.

The Hebrew word most often translated “pity” seems close in meaning to the English word “empathy.”

Empathy means the ability to understand and share the feelings of another.

Sympathizing with or having compassion for someone or something is the basis of these words.

Don H. Stewart wrote on the topic of compassion in *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*.

He wrote, “With the emotional content goes the intellectual intent to help.”¹

God forbade Israel to have “pity” on the peoples they drove out of the promised land.

Deuteronomy 7:16, says, “You shall consume all the peoples whom the Lord your God will deliver to you; your eye shall not **pity** them, nor shall you serve their gods, for that would be a snare to you.”

God refused “pity” upon the disobedient people, whether Israel or its neighbors.

Ezekiel 5:11 says, “‘So as I live,’ declares the Lord God, ‘surely, because you have defiled My sanctuary with all your detestable idols and with all your abominations, therefore I will also withdraw, and My eye will have no pity and I will not spare.’”

A contrast between the emotional and intellectual elements of compassion is seen when Jonah had compassion on a plant (Jonah 4:10) but did not have compassion on the population of Nineveh “who did not know the difference between their right and left hand” (Jonah 4:11).

God is compassionate; he lives and acts according to who He is.

In his sovereignty (supreme power or authority) and divine wisdom, God will show compassion.

When Moses saw God’s glory while standing in the cleft of the rock, God said, “I Myself will make all My goodness pass before you, and will proclaim the name of the LORD before you; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show compassion on whom I will show compassion” (to greet or meet with love or take pity on Exodus 33:19).

To whom is compassion shown?

I. The Regulars

Compassion is shown to the regulars.

Another Hebrew word for compassion means “to regret,” “to be sorry for,” “to grieve over,” or “to spare someone.”

¹ Don H. Stewart, [“Compassion.”](#) ed. Chad Brand et al., *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), 325.

In 2 Samuel 12, this is the incident where Nathan went to David about his sin with Bathsheba, Nathan relates a story of how a rich man with many lambs took the sole lamb of a poor man to provide for a “wayfarer who had come to him.”

The Bible reads in 2 Samuel 12:4, “Now a traveler came to the rich man, And **he was unwilling** to take from his own flock or his own herd, To prepare for the wayfarer who had come to him; Rather he took the poor man’s ewe lamb and prepared it for the man who had come to him.”

NASB says, “unwilling;” KJV says, “spared;” NIV says, “refrained.”

The rich man had more compassion for **his sheep** than for his poor neighbor from whom he stole.

We show more compassion to people and things that are our own than we do to others and their positions.

Close connections are shown compassion.

The Gibeonites wanted seven men of Saul’s descendants to be handed over to them to be executed for a transgression of Saul against them.

“Because of the oath of the LORD which was between” David and Jonathan, David had mercy on Mephibosheth and **spared** him (2 Samuel 21:6).

Mephibosheth was the son of Jonathan, the close friend of David.

Pharaoh’s daughter showed compassion to baby Moses (Exodus 2).

She saw the basket he was in “among the reeds and sent her maid, and she brought it to her. When she opened it, she saw the child, and behold, the boy was crying. And she **had pity** on him and said, ‘This is one of the Hebrews’ children’” (v. 6).

What a shame and disgrace it is for so many not to show compassion to babies.

Rahem (Ray-hom) is a Hebrew word translated “compassion,” that is related to the Hebrew word for “womb.”

The term expresses a mother or father’s compassion for a helpless child.

Isaiah 49:15 asks, “Can a woman forget her nursing child And have no **compassion on the son of her womb?** Even these may forget, but I will not forget you,” God speaking.

Psalms 103:13 says about God, “Just as a father has **compassion on his children**, So the Lord has **compassion on those who fear Him.**”

This compassion is protective and seeks to be expressed in aggressive acts of selfless service.

“The majority of Bible uses of *racham* (Ray-hom) have God as the subject (the giver) and someone or something in the temporal world as the object (the recipient). Compare Hos. 2:4, 23; Zech. 1:16; 10:6, and Ps. 145:9.”²

The adjective form of this Hebrew word “describes God as a “compassionate” God (Exod. 34:6), and usually refers to God’s compassion toward His people (2 Kgs. 13:23).”³

God’s covenant relationship with his people, Israel, required this compassion.

II. The Rebellious

God had compassion for his people when they were rebellious.

² Ibid.

³ Eugene E. Carpenter and Philip W. Comfort, [*Holman Treasury of Key Bible Words: 200 Greek and 200 Hebrew Words Defined and Explained*](#) (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 37.

Elisha said that all the days of Jehoahaz (Jehoa-haz), “Hazeal (Haza-el) king of Aram...oppressed Israel. But the Lord was gracious to them and **had compassion on them and turned to them because of His covenant** with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and would not destroy them or cast them from His presence until now” (2 Kings 13:23).

Zedekiah rebelled against the Lord and against Nebuchadnezzar after swearing allegiance to God; but, 2 Chronicles 36:15 and 16 says, “The Lord, the God of their fathers, sent word to them again and again by His messengers, because He **had compassion on His people and on His dwelling place**; but they continually mocked the messengers of God, despised His words and scoffed at His prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against His people, until there was no remedy.”

In anger, God often showed no pity on rebellious people.

Zechariah 11:6 are his recorded words, “For I will **no longer have pity** on the inhabitants of the land,’ declares the Lord; ‘but behold, I will cause the men to fall, each into another’s power and into the power of his king; and they will strike the land, and I will not deliver them from their power.’”

God’s compassion for the rebellious was aimed at changing their situation; Ezekiel 7:4 explains this succinctly. God said there, “**For My eye will have no pity on you, nor will I spare you**, but I will bring your ways upon you, and your abominations will be among you; then you will know that I am the Lord!”

By His grace, God more often showed compassion or had pity on his people.

As Lot and his wife were leaving the city of Sodom, Lot hesitated (Genesis 19:16), so the two angels “seized his hand and the hand of his wife and the hands of his two daughters, **for the compassion of the LORD was upon him...**”

When Israel rebelled with the golden calf at Mount Sinai, God showed his compassion by forgiving them and reestablishing the covenant based on who He is, not who they were (Exodus 34).

Malachi 3:17 sums up God’s compassion for his people by His grace, “‘They will be Mine,’” says the Lord of hosts, ‘on the day that I prepare My own possession, and I will spare (have compassion on) them as a man spares (has compassion on) his own son who serves him.’”

In what is possibly a messianic reference, God would enable the inhabitants of Jerusalem, through his grace, to mourn the one they pierced (Zechariah 12:10).

When God is ready to show compassion, he will show compassion, even to the rebellious.

III. The Repentant

Micah, a prophet of God, pleaded to God who pardons and removes the sins of His people to “again have compassion on” His people (Micah 7:19).

When God chastised Israel for her rebellion, the nation feared that God had permanently taken his favor away from them.

Asaph, in Psalm 77, cries out to God in deep trouble and searches for the Lord.

He is so distressed he cannot pray or sleep.

While he painfully remembers the good old days, he wonders if God has abandoned him.

Asaph asks in Psalm 77:9, “Has God forgotten to be gracious, Or has He in anger withdrawn His compassion?”

Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Hosea questioned if God had permanently withheld his compassion from His people.

Two forms of another Hebrew word (Ni[ne]-hom or Nocham) are particularly important.

This Hebrew word includes the will to change the situation.

In Genesis 6:6, “The LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in/to His heart,” but God still acted to preserve human life (Genesis 8:21).

God, who is called the Glory of Israel, does not change his mind according to a reliable translation of 1 Samuel 15:29; other options include “have regret,” “relent,” or “recant.”

However, there is a sense in which God does “repent,” which normally means to change one’s mind and action.

Three examples include Exodus 32:14 as Moses pleaded for the people before God reminding him of his covenant with Abraham, thus God did not destroy Israel because of the gold calf; 2 Samuel 24:16 where David repented of his sin and had to choose the punishment after taking a census of the people, but God stayed the hand of the death angel as he was about to destroy Jerusalem; Jonah 3:10 regarding the people of Nineveh when they “turned from their wicked way.”

In each of these cases, the people or the circumstances changed enough for God to deal with them differently.

God’s compassion would revive, and he would restore his people, especially when they returned to him and cried out for deliverance.

Application:

J. W. Meiklejohn (Pronounced: Mekul-John) “The prophets and other men of God...taught that anyone who had experienced [God’s mercy] would feel it his duty to have compassion on his fellows...”⁴

Compassion is to be shown to the regulars as we might consider them, the people we normally think about; Those who are our own, those with whom we have a close connection, For babies, and the people in a covenant relationship with God.

Rebellious people receive compassion because of who God is, not what they have done, because of his grace, not because they deserve it, because he is just, not because they are right.

Repentant people are shown compassion because they learn to fear the LORD, usually because of the punishment put upon them; when rebellious or disobedient people return to God and cry out for deliverance, God shows them compassion.

Conclusion:

God wants to show his compassion to you.

Believe that God will show compassion when you repent of sin, confess belief in His Son, and are obedient to His will being baptized for the forgiveness of sins.

The wayward, those who have erred on his way, anyone who practices sin and lawlessness can receive compassion from God.

Turn to God and be delivered from sin, while we stand and sing.

⁴ J. W. Meiklejohn, “[Compassion.](#)” ed. D. R. W. Wood et al., *New Bible Dictionary* (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 218.