WORD STUDY OF ‘PLEASANT’ IN PSALM 133

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Dr. Ronald B. Allen
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by
Carlton Kevin Perry
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I. Etymology

A. The word “pleasant” in the New American Standard Updated Edition Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible is used 33 times. Of these 33 times, the majority of these occurrences are in Psalms (5) and Proverbs (7). The Hebrew word for “pleasant” in Psalm 133:1 is naim. The verbal root of naim is naem, which is number 5276 in the New American Standard Hebrew-Aramaic and Greek Dictionaries. The basic definition of this verbal root is to be pleasant, sweet, delightful, lovely or to surpass in beauty.

B. Basic spellings and meaning of the verbal root in other Semitic languages

1. In Phoenician the root has been found to mean good.
2. In Arabic it is spelled na’ima and means be plentiful, easy, pleasant. It is also spelled an’ama which means show gracious favor toward.
3. In Ethiopic it is spelled `addama and means be pleasant.
4. In Old Aramaic the root is used to mean my darling or my songs.
5. In Ugaritic literature the word is commonly used to mean good.

C. Hebrew synonyms for naim with their meaning

1. Nō’am: pleasantness, beauty, kindness, favor
2. Na’amān: pleasantness
3. Man’amāmīm: delicacies, dainties
4. Tob: to be pleasing or good
5. Chemdah: desire, delight, beautiful
6. Mathoq: to be sweet or pleasant
7. Yatab: to be good, well, glad or pleasing
8. Chalaq: to be smooth
9. **Chamad**: to desire, take pleasure in
10. **Arab**: to be sweet or pleasing

D. The word for for “pleasant” in Psalm 133:1 is the Hebrew word **naim** which is from the verbal root word **naem**. This verbal root means *to be pleasant* and the adjective form means *pleasant, delightful, lovely or beautiful*. An examination of other Semitic languages shows that the word is most commonly used in a positive sense to convey a favorable disposition or pleasantness. Of note is the Old Aramaic occurrence which conveys a sense of special favor meaning *my darling*. The related words are always found to mean something good or delightful.

II. Biblical Usage of **naim**

A. Sample usages of **naim** found in scripture (ESV)

1. Job 36:11 - “If they listen and serve him, they complete their days in prosperity, and their years and **pleasantness**.”
2. Psalm 16:6 - “The lines have fallen for me in **pleasant** places, indeed I have a beautiful inheritance.”
3. Psalm 135:3 – “Praise the Lord, for the Lord is good; sing to his name for it is **pleasant**.”
4. Psalm 147:1 – “Praise the Lord! For it is good to sing praises to our God; for it is **pleasant**, and a song of praise is fitting.”
5. Proverbs 22:18 - “For it will be **pleasant** if you keep them within you, if all of them are ready on your lips.”
6. Proverbs 23:8 – “You will vomit up the morsels that you have eaten, and waste your **pleasant** words.”
7. Proverbs 24:4 – “by knowledge the rooms are filled with all precious and **pleasant** riches.”
8. 2 Samuel 23:1- “Now these are the last words of David: The oracle of David, the son of Jesse, the oracle of the man who was
raised on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob, the sweet psalmist of Israel.”

9. Psalm 81:2 – “Raise a song; sound the tambourine, the sweet lyre with the harp.”

10. 2 Samuel 1:23 – “Saul and Jonathan, beloved and lovely! In life and in death they were not divided; they were swifter than eagles; they were stronger than lions.”

11. Psalm 16:11 - “You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.”

12. Song of Solomon 1:16 – “Behold, you are beautiful, my beloved, truly delightful.”

B. Scriptural occurrences of naim in the book of Psalms

1. Psalm 16:6 - In this passage there is a synonymous parallelism of “pleasant places” with the term “beautiful inheritance.” The blessing of God compare to the best possible inheritance.

2. Psalm 16:11 – God brings life, joy and pleasure. All three of these terms are ways of speaking of the blessing of God for His people.

3. Psalm 81:2 – While there is no direct parallelism that might give context to the meaning, the overall sense of this text is a positive context of praising God via song.

4. Psalm 135:3 – The term is used here in then context of praising the LORD. There is synonymous parallelism between “for the LORD is good” and “for it is pleasant.” The word for “good” here is tob which is a synonym for naim.

5. Psalm 147:1 – Again in the context of praising the LORD, there is a synonymous parallelism between “For it is good” and “for it is pleasant.” The word for “good” is again tob.
C. The most significant usage of a synonym for naim that occurs in the context of Psalms is the word tob. In the verbal root form this word means to be pleasing or good. As an adjective, as it is used in Psalm 135:3 and 147:1, tob means pleasant agreeable, or good.

III. Based on the information uncovered in researching the etymology and biblical usage of the word naim, it appears well founded to say that the etymological data is helpful and does indeed affirm the stated definition of the term as pleasant. The contextual clues of Psalm 135:3 and 147:1 are perhaps of the greatest help in discerning this meaning. These Psalms along with 133 are in book 5 of the psalter and carry a heavy emphasis on praising the LORD. Within these Psalms are very clear examples using tob as a synonym for naim via parallelism. This word tob also shows up in Psalm 133 alongside naim in describing the unity of gathering together with brother to praise the LORD. It is again noted that tob and naim are used together in the context of praise.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


