

John Alexander
Hebrew Exegesis Assignment 6:
Usage of נָתַן

Dictionary definitions:

According to the BDB, the word נָתַן has the following meanings:

- basic meaning: “to throw, cast.”
- *Hiphil*: give thanks, confess, [possibly] acknowledge.
- *Qal*: “to shoot at.”
- *Piel*: “to cast.”
- *Hithpael*: “to confess, give thanks (in ritual worship).”

The word occurs mostly in the *hiphil* stem.

Concordance studies:

The word נָתַן occurs 114 times in 111 verses of the Old Testament:

<i>Praise</i>	<i>Confession</i>	<i>Acknowledgement</i>
Gen 29:35 (<i>hiphil</i>)	Lev. 5:5 (<i>hithpael</i>)	1 Kings 8:33, 35 (<i>hiphil</i>)
Gen 49:8 (<i>hiphil</i>)	Lev 16:21 (<i>hithpael</i>)	Job 40:14 (<i>hiphil</i>)
2 Sam 22:50 (<i>hiphil</i>)	Lev 26:40 (<i>hithpael</i>)	
Isaiah 12:1, 4 (<i>hiphil</i>)	Num 5:7 (<i>hithpael</i>)	
Isaiah 25:1 (<i>hiphil</i>)	Dan 9:4, 20 (<i>hithpael</i>)	
Isaiah 38:18-19 (<i>hiphil</i>)	Ezra 10:1 (<i>hithpael</i>)	
Jeremiah 33:11 (<i>hiphil</i>)	Neh 1:6, 9:2-3 (<i>hithpael</i>)	
Psalms: 67 occurrences, 64 vv. (<i>hiphil</i>)	2 Chron 30:22 (<i>hithpael</i>)	
Ezra 3:11 (<i>hiphil</i>)		
Neh 11:17, 12:24, 46 (<i>hiphil</i>)		
1 Chronicles: 9 vv. (<i>hiphil</i>)		
2 Chronicles: 7 vv. (<i>hiphil</i>)		

Jeremiah 50:14: *qal*, to shoot arrows

Zechariah 1:21 (2:4 MT), Lamentations 3:53: *piel*, to cast or throw

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Categories of Meanings

The word נָתַן implies the following meanings in the MT:

1. Shooting of arrows. This form of the verb (*qal*) occurs only in Jeremiah 50:14 (“shoot at her, show no pity with your arrows”).
2. Casting down. This form of the verb (*piel*) occurs only in Zechariah 1:21 (2:4 MT) (“and these have come to cause fear in them, to cast down the horns of the nations”) and Lamentations 3:53 (“they [threw] me into a pit and cast a stone at me”).
3. To praise. This form of the verb (*hiphil*) is the dominant meaning of the word.
 - Genesis 29:35: when Leah gave birth to Judah (“this time I will praise the LORD.”)
 - 2 Samuel 22:50: when David was given rest from his enemies (“for this I will praise you, LORD, in the nations”).
 - This is the sole form of the word used in the Psalms (e.g. Psalm 138:1, “I give you thanks with all my heart,” and Psalm 136:1, “Give thanks unto the LORD, for He is good...”) and in 1 Chronicles, when David organized the Levites into orders for music and service (e.g. 1 Chronicles 16:41, “with them were Heman and Jeduthun (this name is derived from נָתַן) and the rest of those purified which were designated by name to give thanks to the LORD, because His steadfast love is everlasting.”).
 - This form of the word is used in Ezra 3:11 (“and they sang to praise and give thanks to the LORD”) when the foundation of the second temple was laid upon the return from captivity.
 - This form is used in Nehemiah 11:17, 12:24 and 12:46 when Nehemiah restored the priestly and levitical orders.
 - 2 Chronicles 30:22: although the word occurs in the *hithpael*, the context (Hezekiah’s restoration of festivals) implies praise rather than confession.
4. To confess sins before God. This definition occurs only in the *hithpael* and refers to personal or corporate confession of sin.
 - In the Pentateuch:
 - Confession of personal sin: Leviticus 5:5, the guilt offering (“he becomes guilty in [a sin] and confesses the sin”); Numbers 5:7: sin offering.
 - Confession of corporate sin: Leviticus 16:21, the offering of atonement (“and Aaron shall lay both hands on the living goat and shall confess on it all the iniquities of the sons of Israel....”).
 - In the rest of the Old Testament:
 - Daniel 9:4, 20: Daniel confessed his sins and the corporate sins of Israel
 - Ezra 10:1: describing Ezra’s confession of Israel’s sin in chapter 9
 - Nehemiah 1:6: Nehemiah confesses on behalf of Israel
 - Nehemiah 9:2-3: The Israelites offer corporate confession
5. To acknowledge God as LORD:
 - 1 Kings 8:33,35: Solomon’s prayer of dedication in the temple
 - Job 40:14: the LORD says He will “acknowledge” Job as the wiser if Job can answer His questions

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Findings

The Hebrew word נְדִיבָה is typically translated various ways:

- “praise:” the word is used to describe Israelite worship, singing of the goodness of God. This word occurs in Genesis 29 when Leah gives birth to Judah, and later throughout the Old Testament in incidents of Israelite worship.
- “confession:” the act of telling God the sins done, either individually or corporately. Examples include Daniel 9, Ezra, 10, and Nehemiah 1.
- “acknowledgement:” the act of recognizing God as the only God and as the ruler of Israel. Solomon uses the word in this fashion in his dedicatory prayer for the temple, proclaiming that when God’s people “acknowledge” Him as LORD, He will restore their fortunes.
- “thanksgiving:” the act of telling God “thank you” for the good He has done for His people. The word is used throughout the Psalms to describe thanksgiving; see Psalm 136:1 for an excellent example.
- The word also occurs once to mean “to shoot” and once to mean “to cast.”

Points to Ponder

The word נְדִיבָה seems to have many meanings; these meanings are not exactly contradictory, but they also seem rather wide-ranging. Praise, acknowledgement, and thanksgiving all seem related in some ways, but confession seems almost the antithesis of praise. (For purposes of this pondering, I’ll omit shooting and casting.)

All of these definitions coalesce around the position of God in Hebrew (and today, in the believer’s) life. God is the sovereign LORD to whom absolute allegiance is due, who is offended by any sin, and who provides everything necessary for our lives. All praise is due Him for His blessings. We acknowledge Him as LORD of our lives at our salvation and in our actions throughout our lives thereafter. When we sin, we confess our sins before Him, admitting our guilt for offending Him but also fully confident of His forgiveness. When we receive forgiveness, we praise Him even more for His forgiveness.