

THE USE OF *ns'* IN THE PENTATEUCH AND ITS CONTRIBUTION TO THE CONCEPT OF FORGIVENESS

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This study investigated the use of the root *ns'* in the Pentateuch in an attempt to discover its semantic relationship to the concept of forgiveness. Survey of the available literature revealed a near vacuum in this area, apart from a couple of careful but brief treatments. Other studies were either very cursory or only partially relevant to the present study. Most writers tend to relegate the concept of forgiveness to the derived meaning of "remove" without substantiating it exegetically.

Cognate languages affirmed the existence of the root and its range of meanings. The widest range of meanings and closest affinity to Hebrew was found in Akkadian. Both languages used *ns'* in the context of caring and in handling wrongdoings.

Biblical usage reveals a syntactically and semantically flexible root. Its basic sense is a deliberate, supportive upwards/onwards movement, both literal and metaphoric. Metaphoric meanings are based on the literal, either in the form of metonymy or by concretizing the abstracts. Idiomatic expressions involving body parts were found to indicate purposeful utilization rather than just some measurable movement.

In the context of *ns'*, sin and wrongdoing are viewed as concrete objects which the wrongdoer must carry. Ultimately, it leads to the death of its carrier. Symbolically, the burden of sin was transferred from the wrongdoer, who carried (*ns'*) it, to the sanctuary via the priests who bore (*ns'*) it on/in his body into the presence of the Lord, whose very nature it is to bear (*ns'*) the iniquities of the people. Once a year these wrongs were removed from the sanctuary and the camp by means of a goat which carried (*ns'*) them into the wilderness. No longer were they held against the people, and they were accepted by God. They could enjoy his blessings, evidenced by his caring concern for *all* their needs, whether spiritual or physical. Humans are to participate actively in this fatherly care, working towards the restoration of others. This whole process is involved in *ns'*-forgiveness. It is not a forgetful declaration of innocence; neither does it allow the wrong to affect the relationship. Instead, it involves an active, caring concern for others and their well-being.