

NINETEEN MORE HAPPINESS WORDS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

My people will be happy forever because of the things I will make.

ISAIAH 65:18, NCV

She was happy, she knew she was happy, and knew she ought to be happy.

JANE AUSTEN, *EMMA*

Humans display happiness in many ways, from quiet worship to loud singing to humble service to skateboarding. To depict these multiple facets, the Old Testament contains many Hebrew synonyms for happiness in addition to *samach* and *asher*. As you'll see from comparing the total number of times each word appears in Scripture (see chapter 22) with the examples I cite, the verses here are only a small sampling. Note that I've italicized the English translations of the particular word for happiness I'm dealing with.

TOB AND TOWB

Definition of *tob*: “festive . . . pertaining to a joyful time or feeling . . . pleasing . . . a feeling of fondness and enjoyment”¹ (486 occurrences)

Proverbs 15:15 says, “All the days of the afflicted are bad, but a *cheerful* heart has a continual feast” (NASB).

The English Standard Version, the New Revised Standard Version, and the Holman Christian Standard Bible also use “cheerful.”

- A *merry* heart hath a continual feast. (KJV)
- *Gladness* of heart [is] a perpetual banquet. (YLT)
- A *happy* heart is like a continual feast. (NCV)

The Good News Translation, the Common English Bible, and the New Living Translation also render *tob* “happy.” “How lovely on the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who announces peace and brings good news of *happiness*, who announces salvation, and says to Zion, ‘Your God reigns!’” (Isaiah 52:7, NASB).

A *Dictionary of Biblical Languages* defines the related *towb* as “gladly . . . good of heart, i.e., a joyful, happy feeling or attitude.”² For example, “You didn’t serve the Lord your God with a joyful and *happy* heart when you had so much” (Deuteronomy 28:47, GW).

YATAB

Definition: “feeling pleasure and enjoyment”³ (117 occurrences)

- The priest’s heart was *glad*. He took the ephod and the household gods and the carved image and went along with the people. (Judges 18:20)
- A glad heart makes a *cheerful* face, but by sorrow of heart the spirit is crushed. (Proverbs 15:13)

SIMCHAH

Definition: “joy, gladness, delight, i.e., a feeling or attitude of joyful happiness and cheerful ness . . . with a focus on sensory input”⁴ (94 occurrences)

- Also in the day of your *gladness* and in your appointed feasts, and on the first days of your months, you shall blow the trumpets over your burnt offerings. . . . I am the Lord your God. (Numbers 10:10, NASB)
- Also blow your trumpets at *happy* times and during your feasts. (NCV)
- All the people went up after him, playing on pipes, and rejoicing [*samach*] with great *joy*, so that the earth was split by their noise. (1 Kings 1:40)
- For seven days they celebrated the Feast of Unleavened Bread in a very *joyful* way. The Lord had made them happy [*samach*], and had turned the heart of the king of Assyria toward them to encourage them in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel. (Ezra 6:22, NCV)

Note the emphasis on the source of their joy: “The Lord had made them *happy*.” The God-commanded feast and celebration were secondary means to happiness, made possible by God, the primary source.

After listening to the Bible read aloud for hours, the Jews were sad to realize they'd fallen short of God's commands. Nehemiah told them, "Do not grieve, for the joy [*chedvah*] of the Lord is your strength" (Nehemiah 8:10, NIV). Just two verses later, we're told of the Israelites' remarkable response: "All the people went their way to eat and drink and to send portions and to make great *rejoicing*, because they had understood the words that were declared to them" (verse 12).

The King James Version translates *simchah* here as "mirth"; the New American Standard Bible renders it "to celebrate a great festival." Simply put, this is a big party.

- You will make known to me the path of life; in Your presence is *fullness of joy*; in Your right hand there are pleasures [*naim*] forever. (Psalm 16:11, NASB)
- You make me *glad* by being near to me. (CEV)
- You have turned for me my mourning into dancing; you have loosed my sackcloth and girded me with *gladness*. (Psalm 30:11, NASB)
- You changed my sorrow into dancing. You took away my clothes of sadness, and clothed me in *happiness*. (NCV)
- Serve the Lord with *gladness*! Come into his presence with singing! (Psalm 100:2)
- Serve the Lord *cheerfully*. (GW)
- The hope of the righteous brings *joy*, but the expectation of the wicked will perish. (Proverbs 10:28)
- The hopes of the godly result in *happiness*. (NLT)
- You have multiplied the nation; you have increased its *joy*; they rejoice [*samach*] before you as with *joy* at the harvest, as they are glad [*gil*] when they divide the spoil. (Isaiah 9:3)
- God, you have caused the nation to grow and made the people *happy*. And they have shown their happiness to you, like the *joy* during harvest time, like the joy of people taking what they have won in war. (NCV)

Here the translators render *simchah* "happy" and "joy" in the same verse, while *samach* is rendered "happiness" and *gil* as "joy." The near interchangeability of the words in Hebrew is reflected in the English translations. We should avoid making sharp distinctions between English terms when they're translations of inspired words without such distinctions.

CHAPHETS

Definition: "delight, take pleasure in, be eager"⁵ (73 occurrences)

- The steps of a man are established by the Lord, when he *delights* in his way. (Psalm 37:23)
- To do Thy pleasure, my God, I have *delighted*. (Psalm 40:8, YLT)
- Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he *pleases*. (Psalm 115:3)
- Keep me obedient to your commandments, because in them I find *happiness*. (Psalm 119:35, GNT)
- "Let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I *delight*," declares the Lord. (Jeremiah 9:24)

RANAN

Definition: "shout for joy, sing for joy . . . loud public melodic and rhythmic words, with a focus on the joy it expresses"⁶ (53 occurrences)

- Satisfy us in the morning with your loyal love! Then we will *shout for joy* and be happy [*samach*] all our days! (Psalm 90:14, NET)
- Good people, rejoice [*samach*] and be happy [*gil*] in the Lord. *Sing* all you whose hearts are right. (Psalm 32:11, NCV)
- Her priests also I will clothe with salvation, and her godly ones will *sing aloud for joy*. (Psalm 132:16, NASB)
- *Shout for joy*, O heavens! And *rejoice*, O earth! Break forth into joyful shouting [*rinnah*], O mountains! For the Lord has comforted His people and will have compassion on His afflicted. (Isaiah 49:13, NASB)
- Heavens and earth, *be happy*. Mountains, shout with joy. (NCV)
- Your dead shall live; their bodies shall rise. You who dwell in the dust, awake and *sing for joy*! For your dew is a dew of light, and the earth will give birth to the dead. (Isaiah 26:19)
- Your people have died, but they will live again; their bodies will rise from death. You who lie in the ground, wake up and be *happy*! (NCV)

The related noun *renanah* is a "shout of joy, i.e., to call out loudly a signal (or possibly words) that communicates joy . . . joyful song, i.e., utter words and sounds of joy by music."⁷

- You satisfy me more than the richest feast. I will praise you with *songs of joy*. (Psalm 63:5, NLT)
- My mouth shall *praise* with lips of *full out joying*. (WYC)
- Serve the Lord with gladness; come before Him with *joyful singing*. (Psalm 100:2, NASB)

- Worship the Lord with joy; come before him with *happy songs!* (GNT)

The noun *rinnah*, with thirty-three appearances in the Bible, means “rejoicing, shout of joy, an expression of a joyful state . . . singing, i.e., the making of joyful music with the voice and words.”⁸

- His anger is but for a moment, His favor is for a lifetime; weeping may last for the night, but a *shout of joy* comes in the morning. (Psalm 30:5, NASB)

Here the ESV doesn’t render the Hebrew word “shout” but says, “Joy comes with the morning,” as essentially do the King James Version, the Revised Standard Version, the New English Translation, and the New Living Translation.

- Those who sow in tears shall reap with *joyful shouting*. (Psalm 126:5, NASB)

This time the ESV does include shouts: “Those who sow in tears shall reap with *shouts of joy!*”

Isaiah 55:12 says, “You will go out with joy and be led forth with peace; the mountains and the hills will break forth into *shouts of joy* before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands” (NASB). The KJV, the RSV, the ESV, and the GNT translate *rinnah* “singing” here instead of “shouts of joy.” Singing is another possible understanding of verbalized joy.

GIL

Definition: “rejoice, be glad, be joyful . . . attitude or feeling of favorable circumstance”⁹ (45 occurrences)

- The king celebrates [*samach*] your strength, Lord; look how *happy* he is about your saving help! (Psalm 21:1, CEB)
- This is the day the Lord has brought about. We will be *happy* and rejoice [*samach*] in it. (Psalm 118:24, NET)
- Let us be *happy*, let us celebrate! (GNT)

The prophet Habakkuk lamented as his nation was threatened by the invading armies of Babylon. At the end of his book, he says,

- Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice [*alaz*] in the Lord; I will take *joy* in the God of my salvation. (Habakkuk 3:17-18)
- I will rejoice because of the Lord; I will be *happy* because of the God who delivers me! (NET)

The ESV translation of *gil*, “take joy,” like the NET’s “I will be happy,” captures Habakkuk’s mindset in the midst of horrific obstacles. He was actively grasping happiness in the Lord—determined, by God’s grace and strength, not to allow his tragic circumstances to defeat him. This is one of the more dramatic proofs in Scripture that joy and happiness aren’t just passive reactions but involve determined choices.

Sometimes we read Scripture about rejoicing or trusting and think, *Easy to say, but you’re not facing what I am*. But few people have faced conditions as dire as Habakkuk, with the impending destruction of his nation, family, friends, and entire way of life. His statement “I will be happy because of the God who delivers me” demonstrates that delighting in God isn’t dependent on favorable circumstances. Happiness in God involves an act of will toward the God who’s there and who loves us, even in hunger, war, and prison cells.

RUWA

Definition: “verbal shout for joy or worship . . . shout in triumph or exaltation”¹⁰ (44 occurrences)

- Make a *joyful noise* to the Lord, all the earth! (Psalm 100:1)
- *Shout for joy* to the Lord, all the earth. (NIV)
- The morning stars sang together and all the sons of God *shouted for joy*. (Job 38:7)

SACHAQ

Definition: “laugh, be amused, play”¹¹ (36 occurrences)

A Hebrew scholar defines *sachaq* as to “make acts which show joy, happiness, and positive laughter, such as dancing, playing, frolicking, or reverent but joyful worship.”¹²

God used the same word when referring to Leviathan playing in the waters (see Psalm 104:26) and children playing in the streets (see Zechariah 8:5).

- David said to [his wife] Michal, . . . “I will *celebrate* before the Lord.” (2 Samuel 6:21)
- I *played* before Jehovah. (YLT)
- I will go on *dancing* to honor the Lord. (GNT)
- I *smiled* on them when they had no confidence, and the light of my face they did not cast down. (Job 29:24)
- I *smiled* on them when they had lost confidence; my cheerful face encouraged them. (GNT)

Sachaq appears twice in the powerful words we discussed in chapter 18, where Wisdom, likely personified by

Christ, says, “I was having fun [*sashua*], *smiling* before him all the time, *frolicking* with his inhabited earth and delighting [*sashua*] in the human race” (Proverbs 8:30-31, CEB).

Note the intense physical energy of *sachaq* evident in these translations:

- Again you shall adorn yourself with tambourines and shall go forth in the *dance of the merry-makers*. (Jeremiah 31:4)
- You will again be happy and *dance merrily* with your tambourines. (NLT)
- And hast gone out in the chorus of the *playful*. (YLT)

TERUAH

Definition: “a blast, i.e., the sound of an ancient trumpet as a signal . . . shouts of joyful acclaim”¹³ (35 occurrences)

From *rua*, this noun is used to describe the great “shout” before the walls of Jericho fell down (Joshua 6:20).

- As the ark of the covenant of the Lord came into the camp, all Israel shouted with a great *shout*, so that the earth resounded. (1 Samuel 4:5, NASB)
- The army *cheered so loudly* that the ground shook. (CEV)
- The Israelites gave such a *loud shout of joy*. (GNT)
- Sing to Him a new song; play skillfully with a *shout of joy*. (Psalm 33:3, NASB)
- He will yet fill your mouth with laughter, and your lips with *shouting*. (Job 8:21)

The words *joy*, *joyful*, or *rejoicing* appear in at least twenty-two translations of this verse. The King James Version renders *teruah* as “rejoicing”; the New International Version, the New Revised Standard Version, the Complete Jewish Bible, the New Century Version, and at least twelve others say “shouts of joy”; and God’s Word Translation says “happy shouting.” The KJV and several other versions don’t use the term “shout,” emphasizing the joy aspect of *teruah* over the volume as the primary intent. Other versions, including the NIV and the NCV, say “shouts of joy.”

SUS

Definition: “a feeling or attitude of fondness and enjoyment in an object, implying a love or relationship to the object of delight.”¹⁴ (27 occurrences)

- May the righteous be glad [*samach*] and rejoice [*alats*] before God; may they be *happy* and joyful [*simchah*]. (Psalm 68:3, NIV)
- I *rejoice* at your word like one who finds great spoil. (Psalm 119:162)
- How *happy* I am because of your promises—as happy as someone who finds rich treasure. (GNT)
 - I will greatly *rejoice* in the Lord; my soul shall exult [*gil*] in my God, for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation; he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself like a priest with a beautiful headdress, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. (Isaiah 61:10)
- I *delight* greatly in the Lord; my soul rejoices in my God. (NIV)
- The Lord makes me *very happy*; all that I am rejoices in my God. (NCV)
- Be *glad* and rejoice [*gil*] forever in that which I create; for behold, I create Jerusalem to be a joy [*gila*], and her people to be a gladness [*masos*]. (Isaiah 65:18)
- My people will be *happy* forever because of the things I will make. (NCV)

RACHAB

Definition: “be joyful, formally, expand . . . be in a state of happiness”¹⁵ (25 occurrences)

- Then you will see and be radiant, and your heart will thrill and *rejoice*; because the abundance of the sea will be turned to you, the wealth of the nations will come to you. (Isaiah 60:5, NASB)
- You will shine with happiness; you will be excited and *full of joy*. (NCV)
- Your heart will throb and *swell with delight*. (CJB)

SASSON

Definition: “gladness, exultation . . . with a focus on making sounds and expressions of joy”¹⁶ (22 occurrences)

I’ll break this treatment of *sasson*, a relative of *sus*, into four components.

God brings his people happiness through his favor and their righteous response.

- The Jews had light and gladness [*simchah*] and *joy* and honor. (Esther 8:16, RSV, ESV)
- There was radiant happiness and *joyous honor*. (NET)

The NIV and several other translations understand the word *orah*, elsewhere translated “light,” as a third synonym for happiness in this verse: “It was a time of happiness [*orah*] and joy, *gladness* and *honor*.”

Sometimes God’s people need help rediscovering their former happiness.

“Restore to me the *joy* of Your salvation and sustain me with a willing spirit” (Psalm 51:12, NASB). The Contemporary English Version renders it, “Make me as *happy* as you did when you saved me; make me want to obey!”

Jesus Christ changed my life when I was fifteen; he infused me with a deep happiness centered in him. As time passed, I had to relearn to celebrate the happiness in Christ that had come so naturally as a new believer. I had to recover my first love: “You have let go of the love you had at first. So remember the high point from which you have fallen” (Revelation 2:4-5, CEB).

God promises to restore Jerusalem and live there with his people in everlasting happiness.

“The ransomed of the Lord will return and come with joyful shouting [*rinnah*] to Zion, and everlasting joy [*simchah*] will be on their heads. They will obtain *gladness* and joy [*simchah*], and sorrow and sighing will flee away” (Isaiah 51:11, NASB).

This passage promises far more than a return from exile; it promises everlasting joy and the final end of sorrow. It’s found in near proximity to passages about the New Earth that include Isaiah 60, 65, and 66, and it sounds very much like the words of Jesus in Revelation 21:1-4 concerning the New Earth.

The joy-rich translations of Isaiah 51:11 bring out different shades of its meaning. Note the translation of *sasson* in these versions:

- The people the Lord has freed will return and enter Jerusalem with joy. Their happiness will last forever. They will have *joy* and gladness, and all sadness and sorrow will be gone far away. (NCV)
- Let [them] . . . come to Zion with singing and with everlasting joy upon their heads. Let *happiness* and joy overwhelm them; let grief and groaning flee. (CEB)
- They will enter Zion with a happy shout. Unending joy will crown them, *happiness* and joy will overwhelm them; grief and suffering will disappear. (NET)

Meditating on God’s Word brings great happiness to the hearts of his people.

“As your words came to me I drank them in, and they filled my heart with *joy* and happiness [*simchah*] because I belong to you, O Lord, the God who rules over all” (Jeremiah 15:16, NET).

What brings joy and happiness to God’s people? Drinking in his words and contemplating the fact that we belong to God, the sovereign ruler and our loving Father. What could be better than that?

MASOS

Definition: “joy, delight . . . showing celebration, gaiety, and merriment”¹⁷ (16 occurrences)

- Beautiful in its loftiness, the *joy* of the whole earth . . . is Mount Zion, the city of the Great King. (Psalm 48:2, NIV)
- It is . . . a source of *joy* to the whole earth. (NET)
- Jerusalem, rejoice [*samach*]. All you people who love Jerusalem, be happy [*gil*]. Those of you who felt sad for Jerusalem should now feel *happy* with her. (Isaiah 66:10, NCV)
- The *joy* of our hearts has ceased; our dancing has been turned to mourning. (Lamentations 5:15)

The GNT renders this verse, “*Happiness* has gone out of our lives; grief has taken the place of our dances.”

Here we see Scripture’s realism. While joy and happiness are to be celebrated and cultivated, there are also times of sorrow and mourning. The New Testament takes us a step further by showing that in times of grief, we can gain perspective on even the deepest sorrow through the indwelling Holy Spirit, our ever-present resource for happiness.

ALAZ

Definition: “in a reveling state of great joy and happiness”¹⁸ (16 occurrences)

- The Lord is my strength and my shield; in him my heart trusts, and I am helped; my heart *exults*, and with my song I give thanks to him. (Psalm 28:7)
- My heart *leaps for joy*. (NIV)
- I am *very happy*. (NCV)
- Let the field be *joyful*, and all that is therein: then shall all the trees of the wood rejoice. (Psalm 96:12, KJV)
- Let the fields be *jubilant*. (NIV)
- Let the countryside and everything in it *celebrate!* (CEB)
- My inmost being will *rejoice* when your lips speak what is right. (Proverbs 23:16, NASB)
- My innermost being will *cheer*. (HCSB)
- Everything in me will *celebrate*. (NLT)

SHASHUA

Definition: “delight . . . an object in which one finds happiness or joy”¹⁹ (9 occurrences)

- If your law had not been my *delight*, I would have perished in my affliction. (Psalm 119:92, ESV, NIV)
- If your law had not been the source of my *joy*, I would have died from my sufferings. (GNT)
- Trouble and anguish have found me out, but your commandments are my *delight*. (Psalm 119:143)
- As pressure and stress bear down on me, I find *joy* in your commands. (NLT)
- Your commandments still make me *happy*. (GW)

ALATS

Definition: “be jubilant . . . verbal expressions of joy and praise”²⁰ (8 occurrences)

- Hannah prayed, and said, My heart *rejoiceth* in the Lord, mine horn is exalted in the Lord . . . because I *rejoice* in thy salvation (1 Samuel 2:1, KJV).
- Protect those who love you; because of you they are *truly happy*. (Psalm 5:11, GNT)
- When it goes well with the righteous, the city *rejoices*, and when the wicked perish there are shouts of gladness [*rinnah*]. (Proverbs 11:10)
- When good people succeed, the city is *happy*. When evil people die, there are shouts of joy. (NCV)
- I will be glad and *rejoice* in thee: I will sing praise to thy name, O thou most High. (Psalm 9:2, KJV)

ALLIYZ

Definition: “rejoicing, reveling . . . a state of great joy”²¹ (7 occurrences)

- The mirth [*masos*] of the tambourines is stilled, the noise [*sasson*] of the *jubilant* has ceased, the mirth [*masos*] of the lyre is stilled. (Isaiah 24:8)

Different translations capture the loss of happiness because of impending judgment:

- The joyful timbrels are stilled, the noise of the *revelers* has stopped, the joyful harp is silent. (NIV)
- The cheerful sound of tambourines is stilled; the *happy* cries of celebration are heard no more. The melodious chords of the harp are silent. (NLT)

ALAS

Definition: “enjoy . . . take pleasure of [in] something or someone”²² (3 occurrences)

Soon after the celebration of sexual love in marriage (see Proverbs 5:18-19) comes this account of a twisted offer of delight in sexual sin: “Come, let us take our fill of love till morning; let us *delight* ourselves with love” (Proverbs 7:18). The God-given pleasure of sex becomes an instrument of destruction: “All at once he follows her, as an ox goes to the slaughter. . . . He does not know that it will cost him his life” (verses 22-23).

CHADAH

Definition: “be delighted, rejoice . . . be in a cheerful mood”²³ (2 occurrences)

- You grant him blessings forever; you make him *happy* with the *joy* of your presence. (Psalm 21:6, CEB)

This is God conveying to us his own happiness!

- Jethro *rejoiced* for all the good that the Lord had done to Israel, in that he had delivered them out of the hands of the Egyptians. (Exodus 18:9)
- Jethro was *delighted*. (NIV, NLT)
- Jethro was very *happy*. (NCV)
- Jethro was *glad*. (CEB)

Here’s another illustration of how a word in the Hebrew semantic domain of happiness can be translated by a variety of English synonyms. The NCV adds the word *very* to “happy” in an attempt to reflect the intensity of *chadah*. But what’s the difference between rejoicing, delighting, or being happy or glad? They’re all on the menu of the happiness semantic domain, and the choices reflect the different preferences of various teams of Hebrew scholars. The essential meaning is the same.

¹ James Swanson, *A Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Hebrew (Old Testament)* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 1997), s.v. “*tob*” and “*towb*.”

² *Ibid.*, s.v. “*towb*.”

³ *Ibid.*, s.v. “*yaal*.”

⁴ *Ibid.*, s.v. “*simchah*.”

⁵ *Ibid.*, s.v. “*hapes*.”

⁶ *Ibid.*, s.v. “*ranan*.”

⁷ *Ibid.*, s.v., “*renanah*.”

⁸ *Ibid.*, s.v., “*rinnah*.”

⁹ *Ibid.*, s.v. “*gil*.”

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- ¹⁰ Ibid., s.v., “*ruwa*.”
¹¹ Ibid., s.v. “*sachaq*.”
¹² Ibid.
¹³ Ibid., s.v. “*teruwah*.”
¹⁴ Ibid., s.v. “*sus*.”
¹⁵ Ibid., s.v. “*rachab*.”
¹⁶ Ibid., s.v. “*sasson*.”
¹⁷ Ibid., s.v. “*masos*.”
¹⁸ Ibid., s.v. “*alaz*.”
¹⁹ Ibid., s.v. “*shashua*.”
²⁰ Ibid., s.v. “*alats*.”
²¹ Ibid., s.v. “*alliyz*.”
²² Ibid., s.v. “*alas*.”
²³ Ibid., s.v. “*chadah*.”



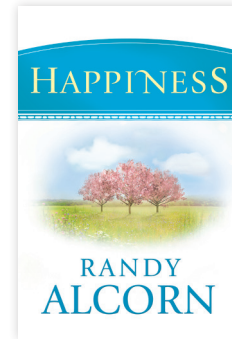
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About Randy Alcorn

Randy is the founder and director of Eternal Perspective Ministries and the best-selling author of over 50 books (over nine million in print) including *Heaven*, *The Treasure Principle*, and the Gold Medallion winner *Safely Home*.



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