

Selah

"Every word of אַיָּהּ (Yahuah) proves true." **Proverbs 30:5**

The Hebrew word "Selah" is used over (70) Seventy times in the Psalms and another musical passage in Habakkuk. "Selah" is part of אַיָּהּ (Yahuah)'s word and it surrounds lyrics in Yisrael's worship material.

Tanakh (Old Testament) uses "Selah" twice as often as "Aman" and three times more than "HalleluYah". All around the World, (2) Two Hebrew words have become international terms; "Aman (Amen)" and "HalaluYAH (HalleluYah)". "Selah" as little as this word is used or understood, is used (3) three times as much in the Tanakh (Old Testament) as "Aman (Amen)" and "HalaluYAH (HalleluYah)"! And "Selah" is used in over 25% of the Psalms!

(74) Seventy-four times in the Tanakh (Old Testament), the writers penned "Selah" in strategic places. "Aman (Amen)" is used (28) Twenty eight times in the Tanakh (Old Testament) and "HalaluYAH (HalleluYah)" (23) Twenty three times. Like "Selah", "HalaluYAH (HalleluYah)" is only used in Psalms. Additionally, all the Psalmists, but (2) two, used "Selah" as part of their inspired text. It is definitely a word worth understanding!

Diving into the study of an ancient Hebrew word opens up deep mines of textual analysis, comparisons of translations and arenas of thought that for the most part, simply provide thousands of words of information. Selah, Strongs #: 5542 means to lift up, exalt. 5541: Celah (Seh'-law); suspension (of music), i.e. pause. Sela: 5553 ragged rock, stony, strong hold. From an unused root meaning to be lofty; a craggy rock, literally or figuratively (a fortress), (ragged) rock, stone(-ny), strong hold. Sela 5554: rock, Selah, A city in Edom. The same as Cela'; Sela, the rock-city of Idumaea rock, Sela(-h). A correct pronunciation of the word is SEE LAH rather than a popular pronunciation of SAY LAH.

The Talmud says that selah is a Barachah (Blessing) meaning "forever". Some declare it is poetic and adds extra emphasis considered the kind of free vocalization that occurs when emotions rise beyond the reach of willful speech: like someone yelling out "Yahu!!! WOW!! WAAHAAA!!!! in joyous emotion.

Wikipedia: Selah may mean "stop and listen", within the context of a prayer or psalms, is similar in purpose to Aman in that it stresses the importance of the preceding passage.

When we see a Selah in a portion of Scripture we should pause and think about what we have just read. In my head when I read "Selah" I say "think on this". In the Scriptures Selah is used as a literary technique to cause the reader to meditate on אַיָּהּ (Yahuah)'s word, such as:

Salvation belongs unto אַיָּהּ (Yahuah): your Barachah (blessing) is upon your people. Selah. **Psalm 3:8**

O men, how long shall my honor be turned into shame? How long will you love vain words and seek after lies? **Psalm 4:2**

Put them in fear, O אַיָּהּ (Yahuah): that the nations may know themselves to be but

men. Selah. **Psalm 9:20**

Who is this King of Esteem (glory)? **אֲדֹנָי** (Yahuah) of hosts, he is the King of esteem (glory). Selah. **Psalm 24:10**

But **אֲדֹנָי** (Yahuah) will redeem my soul from the power of the grave: for he shall receive me. Selah **Psalm 49:15**

You went out for the salvation of your people, for the salvation of your anointed. You crushed the head of the house of the wicked, laying him bare from thigh to neck. Selah. **Habakkuk 3:13**

In scripture it is almost always used as denoted by the Hebrew definition – as a pause such as at the end of a verse or the end of a Psalm. In modern times many believe it was originally a musical term placed to cause one to pause because 31 of the 39 Psalms that contain this word have a salutation “To the chief Musician”. Some say it means to pause and meditate upon what you just read or heard.

The Septuagint Greek used the word "diapsalma, which is translated "interlude" or "postlude" depending on the location of the notation. The quality of translation varies widely within the sections of the Septuagint, and it is easy to dismiss this rendering. However, it is difficult to not think "Selah" is musical term since it is found 100% of the time imbedded in the text of the Psalms. And yet, many musical terms have evolved from everyday common words from various languages. "Allegro" means "happy" for example, in Italian. And in music it means an upbeat tempo.

(2) Two Viable Hebrew Root Words for "Selah"

"Calah"- 5541 סָלַח is the root of "selah". They are very similar in Hebrew! **Job 28:16** and **19** use it as "weighed" or "valued" against. "Selah" has a meaning of "weigh" this, "value" it. The idea certainly works when you examine the 74 times "Selah" is used in scripture.

"Salal"-5549 סָלַל This Hebrew word "salal" (saw-lal) is also cited as a possibility for a root to the term "selah." It is translated "build up", "lift up" or "exalt." These synonyms are used from its primary to alternate meanings in scripture. The idea is to build up a road so it can be traveled upon. Or it is used to "exalt", "lift up", or "highly prize" something.

It is used to "Halal (Praise) Enthusiastically **אֲדֹנָי** (Yahuah)" in adoration and fear in **Psalm 68**. And in this psalm, we see a use of "Salal" used very similarly to "Selah" in the same psalm. **Verse 19** and **32** are verses with "Selah" at the end - And they are imperatives to sing Halal (Praise) to **אֲדֹנָי** (Yahuah).

Verse 4 is an identical imperative - the (1st) first of the (3) three uses of "salal" or, translated here as "extol" (Praise Enthusiastically).

Scripture Shedding Light on Scripture: Psalm 68:4,19,32

4 Sing to **אֲדֹנָי** (Yahuah), sing in Halal (Praise) of his Name, extol (Salal) him who rides on the clouds; Rejoice before him—his name is **אֲדֹנָי** (Yahuah).

19 Praise be to אַיָּאֵל (Yahuah), to אַיָּאֵל (Yahuah) our Savior, who daily bears our burdens. **Selah**

32 Sing to אַיָּאֵל (Yahuah), you kingdoms of the Earth, sing Halal (Praise) to the אַיָּאֵל (Yahuah), **Selah**

We need to look at the authors of the Tanakh (Old Testament) who used the word "Selah" in Psalms. Habakkuk wrote a Psalm in his book, and he used it (3) three times under inspiration. All total, the word is recorded (74) Seventy four times in אַיָּאֵל (Yahuah)'s word. Since it is used significantly more than both "Aman (Amen)" and HalaluYAH (HalleluYah), it certainly worth the reading and study to seek its meaning!

Who used "Selah" and how often in each Psalm?

When used, "Selah" was used on the average (2) two times per Psalm. Ethan the Ezrahite, used "Selah" (4) four times in **Psalm 89**. Ethan was an amazing man and in (1) one account was held up as a measure of Solomon's wisdom. Another Psalmist, Heman, was noted in the same passage. **I Kings 4:31** Both of them wrote (1) One Psalm. Heman was not one of the "Sons of Korah", but their work was mutually included in **Psalm 88** with him. David's usage of "Selah" was naturally the most prolific since he penned nearly 50% of all the Psalms.

What happens in a Psalm when "Selah" is used?

Psalm 3:1 אַיָּאֵל (Yahuah), how many are my foes! How many rise up against me!
2 Many are saying of me, "אַיָּאֵל (Yahuah) will not deliver him." **Selah**
3 But you, אַיָּאֵל (Yahuah), are a shield around me, my esteem, the One who lifts my head high. 4 I call out to אַיָּאֵל (Yahuah), and he answers me from his Kadosh (holy) mountain. **Selah** 5 I lie down and sleep; I wake again, because אַיָּאֵל (Yahuah) sustains me. 6 I will not fear though (10's) tens of (1000's) thousands assail me on every side. 7 Arise, אַיָּאֵל (Yahuah)! Deliver me, my Aluah (God)! Strike all my enemies on the jaw; break the teeth of the wicked. 8 From אַיָּאֵל (Yahuah) comes deliverance. May your Barachah (Blessing) be on your people. **Selah**

What we see (3) three times is "Selah." The (1) one at the end of verse 8 is a "Closing Selah." This closing function only happens (4) four times out of the (74) Seventy four uses of "Selah". But what do you see happen after verse 2? Something happens to the direction of the lyrics. Did something happen in David's heart? Now, look at the (2nd) second Selah after verse 4. The lyrics take on another direction. And what of David's thoughts? There is a clear progression taking place! David sings; from אַיָּאֵל (Yahuah) comes deliverance. May your Barachah (blessing) be on your people." **Selah**

What happens after that "closing Selah"? David transforms from fear to Amanah (faith), then to confident trust. Wouldn't the natural tendency be for us to transform as well as we reflect on אַיָּאֵל (Yahuah)'s Barachah (blessing) of deliverance? That's just (1) one Psalm. But it is a good example of the general function of "Selah." We

don't know what happened with the music or the singing after "Selah" but we can see that something happened in the lyrics from the heart of the psalmist when "Selah" was noted. With that (1) one Psalm of David we saw a "closing Selah" and a pair of a transitional or "Transformative Selah's. "Let's look at a Psalm by the Sons of Korah. Here we will see the "transformative Selah" at work with something a bit different. Let's look at **Psalm 46**. Just as **Psalm 3** is a familiar "Worship Song of the Kingdom", **Psalm 46** is familiar to us as well. "Be still my Soul"!

Psalm 46:1 יְהוָה (Yahuah) is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. 2 Therefore we will not fear, though the Earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, 3 though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging. **Selah** 4 There is a river whose streams make glad the city of יְהוָה (Yahuah), the Kadosh (holy) place where the Most High dwells. 5 יְהוָה (Yahuah) is within her, she will not fall; יְהוָה (Yahuah) will help her at break of day. 6 Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall; he lifts his voice, the earth melts. 7 יְהוָה (Yahuah) Almighty is with us; the Aluah (God) of Jacob is our fortress. **Selah** 8 Come and see what יְהוָה (Yahuah) has done, the desolations he has brought on the earth. 9 He makes wars cease to the ends of the earth. He breaks the bow and shatters the spear; he burns the shields with fire. 10 He says, "Be still, and know that I am Aluah (God); I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the Earth." 11 יְהוָה (Yahuah) Almighty is with us; the Aluah (God) of Jacob is our fortress. **Selah**

Here in **Psalm 46**, we see a closing Selah and transformational Selah. In addition we see the use of a repeated phrase Selah." This type of Selah is used (8) eight times in the (74) Seventy four selah occurrences. For me, the refrain in verse 7 and verse 11 are very interesting.

So often we focus on **verse 10** - "Be Still and know that I am Aluah (God); I will be exalted among the nations. I will be exalted in the Earth." And yet the selah verse is actually more important in the sense that, it is the thought that יְהוָה (Yahuah) wants us to internalize. Yes, "being still" before our exalted Aluah (God) is crucially important. But what a transformation of our heart takes place if we look closely at the Selah verse after that: "יְהוָה (Yahuah) Almighty is with us; the Aluah (God) of Yaaqob (Jacob) is our fortress." Isn't that really what יְהוָה (Yahuah) wants us to know and appreciate? Who can truly succeed in life without יְהוָה (Yahuah)? What energizes our Amanah (faith) more than knowing יְהוָה (Yahuah) is with us as we do his will?

Selah puts our focus on the things יְהוָה (Yahuah) wants us to think about. Most of the time, as we see in **Psalm 46** and **Psalm 3**, when "Selah" is noted, there is a transformation of the lyrics to a new topic or focus.

As a matter of fact, if you separate out the (4) four "Closing Selahs" from the (74) seventy four uses of "Selah" there is a definitive topic/heart change in the text of the Psalms.

Even with out knowing the meaning of the Word, or what happened with the music, it is clear that "Selah" is used with intention by his inspired psalmists! The passages following Selah display a change of direction in the heart of the singing prophet.

It is as though, after a "Selah", the writer grasped a renewed direction - sometimes increased Amanah (faith), stronger feelings, deeper appreciation of one of אֱלֹהִים (Yahuah)'s splendorous attributes, a widened lament or a deeper sense of security. Selah made the authors take pause, and then take action in their minds, hearts and souls.

Lift up! Exalt! Highly Prize!

For me, "**Salal**" is a stronger candidate to marry up to "**Selah**" as a meaning for it. The application, when you "lift up" the thoughts that have "**Selah**" after them has the same effect as "**Calah**." You reflect on the lyrics! One is placing a high value on the text when weighing it. The other is placing a high value on the text as you lift it up and highly prize it! And when you lift up אֱלֹהִים (Yahuah)'s word, you lift your soul, your hands, your mind, your heart, your voice and your whole life! That is what makes one "upright"!

History Shedding Light on Scripture

The practice to "lift up" the word of אֱלֹהִים (Yahuah) was customary throughout Yisrael's history. The Psalmist even praised אֱלֹהִים (Yahuah)'s word. "When I am afraid, I put my trust in you. In אֱלֹהִים (Yahuah), whose word I Halal (Praise)—in אֱלֹהִים (Yahuah) I trust and am not afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?" **Psalm 56:4,10**

"I bow down toward your Kadosh (holy) temple and give thanks to your name for your steadfast love and your faithfulness, for you have exalted above all things your name and your Word." **Psalm 138:2**

In the Brit Hadashah (New Testament), we see the Gentiles being taught by their Hebrew brothers to do the same in **Act 13:47-48**

"For this is what אֱלֹהִים (Yahuah) has commanded us: " ' I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.' "When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the Word of אֱלֹהִים (Yahuah); and all who were appointed for eternal life believed."

Scripture was held in the absolute highest regard to the Hebrews. For example, in the synagogues, when the scrolls were brought forth for reading as in **Luke 4**, the synagogue attendant would raise the scroll up above his head and walk around the standing congregation (3) three times. The congregants remained completely silent in reverence to the Kadosh (holy) word of אֱלֹהִים (Yahuah). That was the context of **Luke 4** as OWHY (Yahusha) preached in the Nazareth synagogue where he grew up. When it says, "he unrolled the scroll and found the place where it is written..." Even today, Hebrew communities continue this practice in conservative congregations everywhere.

What Selah Means to Me

Scripture study is all about "meaning" and understanding what אֱלֹהִים (Yahuah) meant. For myself, after examining these passages closely, looking at Hebrew traditions, and looking at the Hebrew terms with the best tools available, I have come to understand the word to mean "lift up" the text preceding "Selah." With

intent, the psalmist has chosen, under inspiration, to place a heightened reverence on certain lyrics. With that, the musicians and congregation knew to focus with utmost reverence on Selah passages. And as you lift up אֱלֹהִים (Yahuah)'s word in your mind and heart, you lift up your entire soul and life to אֱלֹהִים (Yahuah).

In my personal reflection, I envision the ancient Hebrew in worship. They would exalt the word and at "Selah" raise it up higher and consider the thought shared with the absolute, utmost highest regard. In other words, as a Psalm was read in the traditional song voice with a harp, the imperative "SELAH" called forth and even higher attention to the phrase just recited.

What would be the natural response to such passages? If, in general, the word of אֱלֹהִים (Yahuah) was revered with silent respect, a call to Selah would have brought the congregants to heed אֱלֹהִים (Yahuah) even more closely in Selah passages. It is similar to **Hebrews 2:1** "We must pay more careful attention to what we have heard" so we do not drift away." It also sheds light on the term for scripture "The fear of אֱלֹהִים (Yahuah)" in **Psalm 19:9**.

In worship, between verses of hymns, praise songs and psalms, we ought to teach our congregations to reflect reverently on the texts that are אֱלֹהִים (Yahuah)'s inspired words or principles. Bands could play instrumentals as people pray over what they have just sung to אֱלֹהִים (Yahuah). New hymns could, with intention, repeat phrases that would "build up" the chosen believers.

Psalm 139:17 - "How precious are your thoughts to me, O אֱלֹהִים (Yahuah). How vast is the sum of them". Certainly, these thoughts are nothing surprising. The book of Psalms starts with the theme "Meditate on אֱלֹהִים (Yahuah)'s word all day long" **Psalm 1**. And אֱלֹהִים (Yahuah) asks us clearly to sing with intention with ardent Ruachs (Spirits) and understanding Minds.