

Ancient Hebrew Research Center

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Biblical Word of the Month – Prayer (1)

By: Kathy Nichols

One of the words meaning to pray is *Palal* from the parent root PL which literally means “Speak to Authority”. The parent root letters being the picture of a mouth  and the picture of a staff . The mouth, in this case, representing speaking, and the staff meaning authority- (hence modern day monarchs holding a sceptre or bishops a crozier.)

In our modern culture, prayer means mainly communication between man and God. This definition certainly does apply to some passages of scripture but it is not the full Hebraic meaning. The parent root *pal* has the meaning “fall”. *Palal* literally means to “fall down to the ground in the presence of one in authority to plead a cause.” A good example of this in Scripture is Isaiah 45:14 (the Sabeans fall down and make supplication to Cyrus). It is a coming to one in authority to intercede or plead on one’s own behalf or for another.

Recently, a good friend of mine was visiting a town 10 km from ours and happened to notice an African lady on her knees pleading to another local lady

for a lift as she had been left completely stranded. As an asylum seeker from Africa this was a terrifying experience for her. The lady drove off disregarding the woman's petition, perhaps due partly to the fact that she was completely taken aback by manner of the woman's request. My friend went to help and brought the African lady and her young child to her destination. It is very unusual in our western culture to experience such intense pleading, but is still common in other cultures, especially where great respect is shown. No wonder Africans know how to pray!

This word *Palal* also means judgment. In Old Testament times the major judicial decisions were made at the gates and entrance to the city. One reason being it was a broad area and easy for people to gather there. If anyone had a grievance they would go and "speak to authority" to obtain the justice they were looking for. The ancient Hebrew concept of a "judge" is one who restores life. The goal of one that judges or rules is to bring a pleasant and righteous life to the people. We can now picture the people of the day hastening to the gates and when their turn comes, falling down and earnestly asking for intervention in their situation of injustice. The judgement is then what is determined out of the pleading. The people in Bible times had amazing concrete examples of pleading in their daily lives as the courts convened and they saw the daily pleading of those carrying grievances desperately looking for just answers. This picture also reminds us of the persevering widow and the unjust judge in Luke 18:6,7 "*Notice what the corrupt judge says. Now won't God grant justice to his chosen people who cry out to him day and night? Is he delaying long over them? I tell you that he will judge in their favour, and quickly! But when the Son of Man comes, will he find this trust on the earth at all?*"

In Psalm 106:30 we read that *Phineas stood up and wrought judgement so the plague was stopped*. The word judgement here is also *Palal*. In other words he intervened with zealous action and protected more people from dying by the plague. His action of intervention was counted to him as righteousness, to all generations forever. By honouring the Lord in such a way, Phineas is still being honoured today. Often during prayer we become enlightened on how to act or how to bring about God's justice into a situation. A key aspect is that prayer and action can and ought to be closely related because prayer and justice are linked in God's mind and in His language.

Palal is also used of Samuel in 1 Sam 12:23 "*.. far be it from me to sin against Adonai by ceasing to pray (palal) for you! Rather I will continue instructing you in the good and the right way.*" Samuel's role was to pray, but also to give instruction which together brought about righteousness and justice. Remembering that Samuel was a judge meant he understood his responsibility in prayer for the people. Here again we can see prayer and action clearly linked. In Hebrew often when the word "and/or but" is used it is not joining two separate sentences like in English, but two ideas which are linked. In our western culture we have been trained to separate things into definite categories, thus sometimes

giving a different meaning to the one originally intended by the Biblical author. Some other words from the PL root are *Paliyl* and *Peliylah* which mean a magistrate and justice respectively. The magistrate renders the judgement, which we saw are “what is determined out of the pleading”.

In Ecc 4:17-5:1 we are reminded to guard our feet when we go to the house of God and be ready to listen and not be quick to speak. This is perfect advice for prayer if we truly desire to “magistrate” or “judge” situations as God wants us to because we need to hear from Him how to pray for something before actually praying. After all, a magistrate or judge would hardly give a verdict without hearing the case first. In the same way I think the Lord is surprised when we assume how to pray without discerning what He wants to do and thus what we should ask for.

The most common noun for prayer in scripture is *t’phillah* – which also has the same PL root and in fact comes from the word *palal*. In Hebrew it is common for verbs to be formed into nouns as the language is very much action-based. This is very different to our modern western languages and culture which consider what we think or believe more valuable and separated from what we do.

Previously we have seen that the original meaning of to pray is to fall down and plead. This in turn brings about a judgment. Because we serve a God who is full of loving-kindness, He desires to bring about a positive judgment. This brings us to the next point.

Another word from the *PL* root is *pala*. Added to this root is the letter *aleph* א which in its original picture form is an ox head meaning “strength”. This word אלו means “perform” i.e. a great work (performed) as an act of intercession (out of a judgement). It is translated wonder, marvellous, and extraordinary. *Pala* is used primarily with God as its subject, expressing actions that “.. *and in our eyes it is amazing!*” Psalm 118:23. Interestingly the first use of this word is in Gen 18:14 “*Is any thing too hard (pala) for Adonai?*” Yet, on the other hand God does not require anything of us that is too difficult (*pala*). Deut 30:11. This certainly lifts our faith to new heights of trust in God for awesome things when we pray. In prayer for our own neighbourhoods, towns, counties God is waiting to do great miracles out of the pleadings of His people, because in His heart prayer and miracles are very much related. Miracles are the judgement God wants to bring about. To our 21st century minds this positive understanding of judgement can seem foreign, but is in fact soundly Biblical.

However, with our new understanding of these various words let’s now look at 1 Chron 16:12 “*Remember the wonders (pala) He has done, His signs, and his spoken judgments.*”

Hebrew is also a very concrete language. In other words uses concepts that can be seen, touched, tasted, smelled and heard.

Just on the fun side. In 2 Sam 17 when David's friends brought supplies and food, beans were included. The word for bean is also from  because of its bent shape as one bowing before one in authority. So whenever you see beans from now on, be reminded that our pleadings and prayers are making a difference to the One in authority who will bring about justice!!

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Name of the Month - Solomon

By: Kathy Nichols

Solomon, the son of David, the man who loved and earnestly sought after wisdom in his early years. His name comes from shalom meaning peace and completeness. The root ShL “to draw out” enables us to understand Solomon's name even more when we remember the Lord appeared to him in a dream asking him what he wanted. (1 Kings 3). The word used for “ask” sha'el is also from the ShL root. AHLB 1472D – Request/ask – to draw out something that is not known. Solomon pleased the Lord by asking for wisdom. Wisdom was the means by which everything was created. Solomon by lifting his voice for wisdom and seeking her foremost and above all else, was able to draw out the most precious treasures of God's greatness and apply them to governing the people in justice, righteousness and with great prosperity and peace. (1 Kings 4:25) To prosper is a drawing out of what is needed. (AHLB 1472K) He also possessed great knowledge in understanding creation. All this in turn inspired the nations of the earth to come to hear, seek and draw out the wisdom of the God of Israel for themselves by coming to Solomon. (1 Kings 10:24)

Question of the Month – Best Translation?

By: Jeff A. Benner

Q: Which version of the Bible is the best translated?

A: All modern translations translate the Hebrew Bible from a modern western perspective and therefore do not do the justice to actual meaning of Hebrew words. Therefore it is imperative to understand the Hebrew language of the Bible from an ancient Hebraic perspective. Each Hebrew word has a Hebraic meaning behind it that is usually very different from the meaning of the English word used to translate it. With that said, I have found the Revised Standard Version to be one of the better translations for a literal rendering of the text. It is not perfect but it is better than most in my opinion. I am currently working on a "Mechanical Translation of the Hebrew Bible" which will translate each Hebrew word exactly the same way each time and is also accompanied with a dictionary that will define each word in its original Hebraic context. For more on this translation see the "[Mechanical Translation](#)" Website.

Verse of the Month – Genesis 18:23

By: Jeff A. Benner

וַיִּגַּשׁ אַבְרָהָם וַיֹּאמֶר הֲאֵף תִּסְפֶּה צְדִיק עִם־רָשָׁע:

And Abraham drew near, and said, Wilt thou consume the righteous with the wicked? (ASV)

וַיִּגַּשׁ (vay-yi-gash)

The base word is נגש (nagash) meaning "to draw near". The letter נ (n) is dropped from verbs beginning with this letter when conjugated. The prefix י (y) identifies the subject of the verb as third person, masculine, singular and imperfect tense and therefore means "he will draw near". The prefix ו (v) means "and" and when prefixed to a conjugated verb it reverses the tense, in this case, from imperfect tense to perfect tense. This word would then be translated as "and he drew near".

אַבְרָהָם (av-ra-ham)

This is the name Abraham which is composed of two words, av meaning father and raham meaning lifted. The name Abraham means "father lifted up".

וַיֹּאמֶר (vay-yo-mer)

This is one of the most common Hebrew words in the Hebrew Bible. The base word is אמר (amar) meaning to speak or say. The prefixes to this verb are identical to the word above. This word means "and he said".

הַאֲפִי (ha-aph)

The base word is אָפִי (aph) meaning "moreover". The prefix הַ (h) is usually used as the definite article (the) but is also commonly used to identify the following sentence as a question.

תִּסְפֹּה (tis-peh)

The base word סָפַח (saphah) means to consume or devour and is closely related to another word, סָפָה (saphah) meaning lips in the sense that the lips are used for eating. The prefix תִּ (t) identifies the subject of the verb as second person, masculine, singular, imperfect tense. This word therefore means "you will devour" but as the sentence is preceded by the הַ (h) it would be "will you devour".

צְדִיקָה (tsa-diyq)

A noun commonly translated as righteous but more Hebraicly means to be on the correct path.

עִם (iym)

A common Hebrew word meaning with.

רָשָׁע (ra-sha)

A noun commonly translated as wicked but more Hebraicly means to be lost from the correct path.

The following is a literal rendering of this verse from its Hebraic meaning.

And Abraham drew near and said, "moreover, will you devour those who are on the correct path with those who are lost from the correct path?"

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