



PDF # 18-Psalms (Blog Post PDF Answer)

Please expound briefly on the following.... the “alms” in Psalms; the derivative of the “Egyptian” Hallel; and the “Selah” expression.

Here is a brief breakdown of these three fascinating biblical concepts:

The “Alms” in Psalms

While the exact word "alms" (charitable gifts given out of mercy to the poor) does not explicitly appear in standard English translations of the Old Testament (it is used primarily in the New Testament), the theology and duty of almsgiving is woven all through the Psalms. In the ancient Hebrew mind, taking care of the poor was not just optional "charity"—it was called *Tzedakah*, which literally means righteousness and justice. The Psalms continuously promote this benevolent spirit: Psalm 41:1 promises, *"Blessed is he who considers the poor; the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble;"* Psalm 112:9 gives the ultimate blueprint of a good person, stating: *"He has dispersed abroad, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever;"* The New Testament concept of alms actually grew out of these exact Old Testament poems.

The Derivative of the “Egyptian” Hallel

The "Egyptian Hallel" is the official designation for Psalms 113 through 118. The word *Hallel* simply means "Praise" in Hebrew (and serves as the root word for *Hallelujah*).



This specific group of chapters is called the *Egyptian Hallel* because its historical core celebrates the Exodus from Egypt and the dividing of the Red Sea (specifically highlighted in Psalm 114).

In Jewish history, these six chapters were sung responsively in the Temple while the Passover lambs were being sacrificed. Families also sang them around the dinner table on Passover night. This collection is almost certainly the exact "hymn" that Jesus and His disciples sang together in the Upper Room right before walking out to the Garden of Gethsemane.

The "Selah" Expression

The word "Selah" appears 71 times throughout the Book of Psalms, usually sitting right at the end of a dramatic sentence or verse. While it is a mysterious word, it serves as an ancient musical and liturgical punctuation mark.

Derived from a Hebrew root word meaning "to lift up" or "to weigh," it essentially instructed the temple singers and musicians to stop, take a deep breath, and pause. When an everyday reader hits a "Selah" in a text, it acts like a spiritual speed bump that tells the mind: *"Quiet your thoughts, pause the music, let the instruments play a musical interlude, and deeply think about what you just read before moving to the next line."*

See below for references¹

¹ AI referenced the following: biblegateway.com; kingjamesbibledictionary.com; facebook.com; biblicalcyclopedia.com; chabad.org; Britannica.com; youtube.com; wcfoundation.org; pray.com; gracefullytruthful.com; bethshalompgh.org; biblicaltraining.org; monergism.com; women.lifeway.com; genevaninstitute.org; Instagram.com