

# Hebrew Word Study – Asaph – A (Song) Collector

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## Hebrew Word Study – Asaph – A (Song) Collector – אָפָה Aleph Samek Pei

Psalms 79:1, “A Psalm of Asaph. O God, the heathen are come into thine inheritance; thy holy temple have they defiled; they have laid Jerusalem on heaps.”

|          |        |       |        |        |         |       |        |        |
|----------|--------|-------|--------|--------|---------|-------|--------|--------|
| א        | ב      | ג     | ד      | ה      | ו       | ז     | ח      | ט      |
| Alef     | Beit   | Gimel | Dalet  | Hei    | Vav     | Zayin | Cheit  | Teit   |
| (Silent) | (B/V)  | (G)   | (D)    | (H)    | (V/O/U) | (Z)   | (Ch)   | (T)    |
| י        | כ      | ך     | ל      | מ      | ם       | נ     | ן      | ס      |
| Yod      | Kaf    | Khaf  | Lamed  | Mem    | Mem     | Nun   | Nun    | Samekh |
| (Y)      | (K/Kh) | (Kh)  | (L)    | (M)    | (M)     | (N)   | (N)    | (S)    |
| ע        | פ      | ף     | צ      | ץ      | ק       | ר     | ש      | ת      |
| Ayin     | Pei    | Pei   | Tzadei | Tzadei | Qof     | Reish | Shin   | Tav    |
| (Silent) | (P/F)  | (F)   | (Tz)   | (Tz)   | (Q)     | (R)   | (Sh/S) | (T/S)  |

The word we render as Psalm in Hebrew is *tehillim* which comes from the root word *halal* where we get the word *Hallelujah* which means *to shine, to boast, to praise to take glory in*. Yet the word that is used in this passage is *mizamar* which comes from the root word *zamar* and means a song of praise. It comes from an old Persian word meaning to play on a reed instrument. A reed instrument was use to play a joyful and happy song. Thus *zamar* is a praise accompanied by joyful music. As this word passed into the Classical Hebrew language it came to mean a joyful song or a song of praise. The Mem is a prefix indicating a preposition and should be rendered as a song of praise from Asaph. Asaph means a gatherer or collector as one who collects songs.

Can you dig it? Asaph is singing a song of praise about the heathen destroying the inheritance of God, defiling the temple and laying Jerusalem into heaps. The Talmud examines this rather strange behavior on the part of Asaph. I mean why is it not titled, *a lament of Asaph, or the weeping of Asaph or even the wailing of Asaph*. Instead it is titled the song of praise from Asaph.

The Talmud seeks to explain this by telling the story of a king who built a beautiful home for his son using only the finest wood and highly polished stones. Then his son strayed off into an evil life. So the king came to the house before it was completely built and tore it down, burning the expensive wood and scattering and scarring the beautifully polished stones. As he was destroying this beautiful home that he was building for his son, his son's tutor took a flute and began playing a joyful song. Those who saw him said, “Why is the king destroying this beautiful home that he was building for his son and you sit and sing?” The tutor replied, “I am singing a joyful song because the father is beating and destroying his sons' house that he built and paid for so he may discipline his son but behold, he is not beating and destroying his son.

There are twelve Psalms attributed to Asaph (50, 73-83). The identity of Asaph has been debated. Asaph could mean a variety of things. It could have been just one person, possibly three different individuals named Asaph or a reference to an individual who was part of a guild or choir known as the Asaphites. It could also refer to those who were singing in the style of the Asaphites.

Whoever wrote this Psalm undoubtedly wrote it during the time when the temple and Jerusalem were being destroyed. This Asaph realized that his people had wandered away from God and God could have destroyed all the people, yet they were just taken into captivity or allowed to stay in the land and work for their survival. The fact is that many survived and were able to carry out a living in the land that had been destroyed or if taken into captivity were not too badly treated. Many were allowed to start and own businesses in Babylon where they were taken into captivity. Daniel was even given a high governmental position in the Babylonian Empire. But their land and all its beauty was laid to waste. Asaph was praising God that He was still a merciful God, that he was allowed to live so he could continue to praise His God.

I drive a young man in my disability bus to the VA hospital occasionally. He lost both legs and just recently had open heart surgery. He commented to me, "Oh, it's not so bad, I still have my head." He has a girlfriend, is going to school and is learning to walk on prosthetics. He can sing a *zamar* that he is still alive and find some usefulness for the life that God has given him. I have worship music on my iPod and whenever he gets into my bus, he wants me to turn the volume up so he can have a little time of praise to God. The other day I was running a little late and had to pick him up at Walgreens where he was getting a prescription filled. I found him waiting outside for me. As he got on my bus he told how a woman came up to him while he was waiting outside in his wheelchair (he wasn't wearing his prosthetics) and wanted to give him five dollars. He told her he really didn't need it and to give it to someone who did. He said to me, "Now do I look like someone who needs five dollars?" Well, yeah, he did but I didn't tell him that.

You know if you have even the mental capacity to praise God you have something to praise Him about. After my father had his stroke, his mental capacities diminished to the point where he did not even know who I was. Yet when I asked him to pray he would immediately bow his head and the first words out of his mouth were ones of thanksgiving.

I have a friend whose husband died on Thanksgiving, then a year later she lost her home on Thanksgiving. This thanksgiving she prepared dinner for some friends, visited a friend who was disabled and gave cards with some money in it to other individuals who had a need. She admitted she had a nice Thanksgiving.

Practically every disabled person or senior citizen I drive in my bus comments with much despair that we are going to have a terrible winter with cold and snow. Except one dear, little saintly woman who said on the first really snowy and cold day she is going to run out

into her back yard look up into heaven and spin around in joy praising God for the cold weather to kill the flu bugs and the snow to cover up all of man's trash and make His world look beautiful. I asked her if she had an ancestor named Asaph.