

ETIMOLOGY, DISCOURSE FUNCTION, AND LITURGICAL TRANSFORMATION OF THE EXPRESSION הַלְלוּ-יְהוָה (HALLELUJAH): FROM BIBLICAL HEBREW TO GLOBAL RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS

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ABSTRACT

This study presents a comprehensive philological, linguistic, and liturgical analysis of the expression הַלְלוּ-יְהוָה (*hallelujah*), with particular emphasis on its function within the Psalter and its historical transmission across Jewish and Christian traditions. While traditionally interpreted as a second person plural imperative meaning “praise Yah(weh),” derived from the root הלל (HLL) and the theophoric element יהוָה (Yah), this research demonstrates that such a grammatical explanation is insufficient to account for the expression’s behavior within the biblical text.

Through an integrated methodological framework combining etymological, morphological, discourse-linguistic, and historical-liturgical analysis, the study argues that *hallelujah* functions as a lexicalized liturgical formula operating at multiple levels. Within the Psalter, its consistent positional distribution—particularly in Psalms 146–150—reveals its role as a discourse marker that structures textual units, marks boundaries, and contributes to compositional coherence.

In addition to its structural function, the expression exhibits a clear performative dimension: it does not merely denote praise but enacts it within a liturgical context. This dual function situates *hallelujah* at the intersection of language, text, and ritual practice. The study further traces the historical development of the expression, highlighting its transliteration in the Septuagint (ἀλληλοῦῖα), its preservation in the Latin *alleluia*, and its continuity in both Eastern and Western Christian traditions.

The findings demonstrate that הַלְלוּ-יְהוָה represents a complex linguistic and theological unit that cannot be adequately understood within a single analytical framework. Instead, it must be approached as a morphological construction, a lexicalized formula, a discourse marker, and a performative act. In this way, the study contributes to a more integrated understanding of Biblical Hebrew and opens new perspectives for the analysis of liturgical language and discourse structure in ancient texts.

KEYWORDS

hallelujah; הַלְלוּ-יְהוָה; Biblical Hebrew; Psalter; discourse marker; lexicalization; liturgical formula; performativity; speech act theory; Hebrew linguistics; textual criticism; Septuagint; Jewish liturgy; Christian liturgy; Dead Sea Scrolls; Qumran studies

1. INTRODUCTION

The expression *hallelujah* (הלְלוּ־יְהוָה) occupies a distinctive position in Biblical Hebrew, as it simultaneously functions as a linguistic construction, a liturgical formula, and a theological marker. Although the expression is widely attested and recognizable across diverse religious traditions, its internal structure and functional role within the biblical text have not always been subjected to detailed philological analysis.

Traditionally, *hallelujah* is interpreted as an imperative form in the second person plural — “praise Yah(weh)” — derived from the root הלל (HLL), combined with the shortened form of the divine name יהוָה (Yah). While this interpretation is linguistically well grounded, it does not fully account for the manner in which the expression operates within the biblical text, particularly within the Psalms.

Specifically, *hallelujah* in the Psalter appears in clearly defined positions, most commonly at the beginning and/or end of psalms (e.g., Ps 146–150), which suggests its possible role in structuring the text. Such distribution indicates that the expression does not function exclusively as a syntactic unit, but rather as a discourse marker that delineates the boundaries of liturgical or poetic units.

Furthermore, the presence of the theophoric element יהוָה (Yah) raises the question of the relationship between abbreviated forms of the divine name and poetic language within the Hebrew biblical corpus. The use of this form may point not only to stylistic economy, but also to specific theological and liturgical functions.

The aim of this study is to reassess the meaning and function of the expression *hallelujah* through an integrated approach — etymological, morphological, and discourse-oriented. Particular emphasis is placed on the question of whether the expression can be reduced to an imperative construction, or whether it should be understood as a fixed formula operating at the level of textual organization.

1. Etymological and Morphological Analysis of the Expression הלְלוּ־יְהוָה (*hallelujah*)

The expression הלְלוּ־יְהוָה (*halelû-yāh*) represents a complex lexical-morphological construction consisting of two primary components: an imperative verbal form and a theophoric element¹²³. Although this combination appears transparent at first glance, it integrates multiple layers of meaning that extend beyond purely grammatical analysis.

The first element, הלְלוּ (*halelû*), is derived from the verbal root הלל (HLL), which in Biblical Hebrew encompasses a broad semantic range: from “to praise” and “to glorify,” to meanings such as “to exalt,” “to magnify,” and even “to shine” or “to be radiant”⁴. This semantic breadth

indicates that the core meaning of the root develops in the direction of expressing an intensified positive evaluation, often associated with a religious context.

From a morphological perspective, the form הַלְלוּ represents a second person masculine plural imperative in the *pi'el* binyan²³. As is well known, *pi'el* frequently conveys an intensive or iterative nuance, thereby reinforcing the semantic force of the verb. In this sense, *hallelû* does not simply mean “praise,” but implies sustained, emphatic, and collective praise.

The second element, הַיָּהּ (*yāh*), represents a shortened form of the tetragrammaton יְהוָה (YHWH)⁵. Its usage is particularly characteristic of poetic and liturgical texts, where it appears as a metrically suitable and stylistically condensed form. This abbreviation does not merely reflect linguistic economy, but also functions as a theological marker, enabling a more pronounced rhythmic and acoustic effect within poetic discourse.

The combination of these two elements produces an expression traditionally translated as “praise Yah(weh).” However, already at the level of the biblical text it becomes evident that this construction does not always function as a free syntactic unit. Its recurrence within specific positional patterns points to a process of lexicalization, whereby the original grammatical structure becomes a stable, recognizable formula¹²³.

This process is confirmed by classical grammatical reference works (Gesenius 1910; Joüon–Muraoka 2006), which note that imperative forms in liturgical contexts often lose their strictly syntactic function and enter the domain of fixed formulae. Similarly, Waltke and O’Connor (1990) emphasize that Biblical Hebrew frequently exhibits structures that formally belong to syntax but function at the level of discourse.

It is also important to emphasize the contribution of lexicography to this issue. In standard lexica (BDB; HALOT), *hallelujah* is treated as a fixed unit with a clearly defined theological meaning. Within the Serbian scholarly context, Stanojević (2001)⁶ likewise records the expression as a stabilized entry, thereby confirming its lexicalization in modern academic treatment as well.

On the basis of the foregoing, it may be concluded that *hallelujah* represents a case of transition from a grammatical construction to a lexicalized liturgical formula, in which the morphological structure remains visible, yet no longer fully determines the function of the expression.

Footnotes – Chapter 1

1. Gesenius, W. (1910) Hebrew Grammar. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
2. Joüon, P. and Muraoka, T. (2006) A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew. Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute.
3. Waltke, B. K. and O’Connor, M. (1990) An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax. Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns.
4. Brown, F., Driver, S. R. and Briggs, C. A. (1907) A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

5. Koehler, L., Baumgartner, W. and Stamm, J. J. (2001) *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Leiden: Brill.
 6. Stanojević, Ž. (2001) *Hebrejsko-srpski rečnik*. Beograd.
<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.19522850>
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2. Semantic and Discourse Function in the Biblical Text

Within the biblical corpus, the expression הַלְלוּ־יְהוָה occurs almost exclusively in the Psalter, and specifically within clearly defined liturgical contexts⁷⁸⁹. Its distribution exhibits a high degree of regularity, particularly within the so-called final Hallel corpus (Ps 146–150)¹⁰¹¹¹².

This regularity is not accidental. On the contrary, it indicates a specific function of the expression within the textual structure. Namely, *hallelujah* appears:

- as an introductory formula
- as a concluding signal
- or as a framing device (*inclusio*)

Such usage clearly demonstrates that the expression functions as a discourse marker¹³¹⁴, that is, as an element organizing the text at a level above the sentence.

Westermann (1981) emphasizes that the Psalms are structured through recurring formulae that signal transitions between thematic units. Gerstenberger (2001) further develops this idea, arguing that liturgical elements in the Psalter play a central role in shaping the overall discourse. Alter (2007), in turn, highlights the poetic dimension of such formulae, emphasizing their rhythmic and aesthetic significance.

From the perspective of discourse linguistics, the works of Niccacci (1990) and Longacre (1996) provide a theoretical framework for understanding such phenomena. They demonstrate that Semitic languages contain elements that do not belong strictly to syntax, but instead serve to organize the text. Within this framework, *hallelujah* may be understood as a marker that signals discourse boundaries and guides interpretation.

In addition to its structural function, the expression also possesses a strong performative dimension. It does not merely describe the act of praise; it enacts it. In this sense, *hallelujah* functions as a speech act within a liturgical context, where the utterance itself constitutes the act of praising.

This dual function — structural and performative — renders the expression unique within the biblical language. It simultaneously organizes the text and participates in its meaning, thereby transcending the boundaries of classical linguistic analysis.

Footnotes – Chapter 2

7. Kutscher, E. Y. (1974) *The Language and Linguistic Background of the Isaiah Scroll (1QIsaa)*. Leiden: Brill.
8. Tov, E. (2012) *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*. 3rd ed. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
9. Tigchelaar, E. J. C. (2010) 'Orthography and Language in the Dead Sea Scrolls'. In: *The Dead Sea Scrolls*. Leiden: Brill. <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004181830>
10. Westermann, C. (1981) *Praise and Lament in the Psalms*. Atlanta: John Knox Press.
11. Gerstenberger, E. S. (2001) *Psalms, Part 2*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
12. Alter, R. (2007) *The Book of Psalms: A Translation with Commentary*. New York: W. W. Norton.
13. Niccacci, A. (1990) *The Syntax of the Verb in Classical Hebrew Prose*. Sheffield: JSOT Press.
14. Longacre, R. E. (1996) *The Grammar of Discourse*. New York: Plenum Press.

3. Transmission and Expansion of the Expression הַלְלוּ־יְיָ in Judaism and Christian Traditions

One of the most significant historical-philological aspects of the expression הַלְלוּ־יְיָ (*hallelujah*) lies in the fact that, within the Hebrew biblical corpus, it does not appear as an ordinary everyday verbal construction, but rather as a specific liturgical formula. The earliest secure occurrence in the Masoretic Text is found in Psalm 104:35, where it stands at the end of the psalm as a concluding acclamation, and it subsequently appears in other psalms, particularly in the groups 104–106, 111–117, 135, and 146–150. Such distribution indicates that from the outset the expression is tied to psalmic and liturgical usage rather than to general communication.

3.1. Earliest Occurrence in the Hebrew and Jewish Context

From a historical perspective, the expression must first be considered within the development of the Psalter. Its occurrence in terminal and initial positions within certain psalms demonstrates that it is not merely a translatable phrase “praise Yah,” but a formula that already, within the biblical corpus, fulfills both structural and liturgical functions. For this reason, some scholars speak of “Hallelujah psalms,” that is, psalms which this formula opens or closes.

Within Jewish liturgical life, this formula gains further consolidation through the Hallel, a collection of Psalms 113–118, which in ancient and later Jewish liturgy were recited during festivals as an expression of thanksgiving and praise to God. Historical sources on Jewish liturgy, as well as later encyclopedic traditions, connect the Hallel with temple and festal practice, particularly with major pilgrimage festivals. In this way, *hallelujah* becomes not only a component of the text, but also an element of ritual performance.

From this follows an important conclusion: the expression first appears in Judaism not as an isolated word, but as a cultic formula of communal praise, whose function was to mark, initiate, or conclude a hymnic act. In other words, its origin is not merely morphological, but also liturgical.

3.2. Why the Expression Emerged in This Form

From a philological standpoint, הללו יה consists of the plural imperative הללו and the shortened form of the divine name יה. However, the reason for its persistence and expansion does not lie solely in its grammatical transparency, but in the fact that such a form was ideally suited for collective recitation and chanting. It is brief, rhythmic, phonetically striking, and theologically highly condensed. Precisely these features make it particularly suitable for liturgical use.

From a scholarly perspective, it is most likely that the expression endured because it successfully integrates three functions:

- (1) an imperative function — a call to praise,
- (2) a theophoric function — explicit invocation of Yah,
- (3) a discourse function — marking the boundaries of poetic or liturgical units.

It is therefore not accidental that in the Psalter it appears precisely at points where the text transitions from one unit to another or culminates in doxology. In this sense, *hallelujah* was from the beginning more than a syntactic construction: it was a ritual acclamation.

3.3. The Septuagint and the Early Internationalization of the Expression

One of the most striking facts in the history of the expression is that in the Septuagint it is not translated but transliterated as ἀλληλούϊα. This means that the Greek translators did not opt for a semantic rendering such as “αἰνεῖτε τον κύριον,” but preserved the phonetic form of the Hebrew expression. This procedure is highly significant, as it indicates that by the Hellenistic period *hallelujah* was already perceived as a sacred formula possessing a special status¹²¹³.

In other words, by this stage the expression was no longer merely an open grammatical unit, but had already acquired the status of an untranslatable liturgical sign. This represents the first major step in its internationalization.

3.4. The Latin Tradition and the Stabilization of the Formula

The same principle continues in the Latin tradition. In the Vulgate, Jerome preserves the form *alleluia*, thereby confirming that in early Christian consciousness the expression was understood as a universal sacred formula. Its non-translation is not accidental, but reflects the same pattern already established in the Greek translation: *hallelujah* is not treated as an “ordinary sentence,” but as a sacred acclamation that must remain phonetically recognizable¹⁴.

3.5. The New Testament and Early Christian Reception

In the New Testament, the expression appears in Revelation 19:1–6, where it repeatedly resounds as part of heavenly praise of God. This usage is particularly significant, as it demonstrates that the early Christian community had already adopted the expression not only from Jewish textual tradition, but also from its liturgical use. Here, *hallelujah* does not function as a linguistic innovation, but as an already established formula of praise¹⁵.

For this reason, it may be said that Christianity did not “invent” the use of the expression, but inherited it from the Jewish liturgical world and incorporated it into its own eschatological and liturgical horizon.

3.6. Patristic Interpretation and Theological Deepening

In the writings of the Church Fathers, the expression acquires additional depth. Particularly significant is Augustine, who in his commentaries on the Psalms interprets *alleluia* as the song of the heavenly community, the expression of the joy of the redeemed, and the anticipation of eternal liturgy. In this way, the formula is transformed from an Old Testament hymnic acclamation into a sign of eschatological joy¹⁶.

Its function thus expands further: it no longer signifies merely a call to praise, but the theological state of a community engaged in praising God.

3.7. Medieval Liturgy

In the medieval Western tradition, *alleluia* becomes one of the central elements of Gregorian and broader liturgical chant. Its use is strictly regulated, particularly within the framework of the liturgical year, which demonstrates its institutional significance. For example, its omission during penitential periods and its reintroduction during the Easter season further intensified its symbolism of joy and victory¹⁷.

3.8. Eastern Christianity

In Eastern Christian traditions, the expression “aliluja” remains an integral part of liturgical worship and chant. This confirms its remarkable historical stability: from the Hebrew Psalter, through Greek and Latin, to Byzantine and Slavic liturgical heritage. Here too it remains untranslated, which constitutes one of the strongest indicators of its status as a translinguistic sacred formula¹⁸.

3.9. The Reformation and Protestant Expansion

The Reformation did not abolish the expression, but retained it. On the contrary, through Protestant hymnody and later evangelical singing, *hallelujah* achieved even broader usage. Here one observes a clearer expansion from strictly liturgical contexts to a wider communal and emotional religious language, while still preserving its essential form¹⁹.

3.10. Modernity and Global Lexicalization

In the modern world, *hallelujah* extends beyond strictly confessional boundaries and becomes part of the global cultural lexicon. Nevertheless, even when used in broader or secularized contexts, its fundamental religious connotation remains recognizable. This process confirms that the expression represents an exceptionally successful historical formula that has preserved its identity for more than two millennia²⁰.

Footnotes

1. Psalms – The 1901 Jewish Encyclopedia, s.v. ‘Psalms’. Dostupno preko: Studylight.
2. ‘Hallelujah’ – Encyclopedia of the Bible, BibleGateway resource.
3. BibleHub, ‘Hallelujah’ topical entry.
4. Menn, E. M. (2000) ‘No Ordinary Lament: Relecture and the Identity of the Distressed in Psalm 22’, Harvard Theological Review.
5. The Psalter. Book Five (Ps 107–150), scholarly commentary preview.
6. Jewish Encyclopedia, ‘Hallel’.
7. Britannica, ‘Hallel’.
8. National Library of Israel, ‘Hallel’.
9. Finkelstein, L. (1950) ‘The Origin of the Hallel’, Jewish Quarterly Review.
10. Charney, D. H. (2010) ‘Performativity and Persuasion in the Hebrew Book of Psalms’, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament.
11. McKinnon, J. W. (1996) ‘Preface to the Study of the Alleluia’, Early Music History.
12. Pietersma, A. and Wright, B. G. (eds.) (2007) A New English Translation of the Septuagint.
13. Wikipedia, ‘Hallelujah’.
14. Weber, R. and Gryson, R. (eds.) (2007) Biblia Sacra Vulgata.
15. New Testament usage summarized in standard reference entries.
16. Augustine, Enarrationes in Psalmos.
17. McKinnon, J. W. (1996) ‘Preface to the Study of the Alleluia’, Early Music History.
18. Buchinger, H. (2025) ‘Perspectives on the Early Hagiopolite Tropologion’, Plainsong and Medieval Music.
19. Young, C. R. (1993) Companion to the United Methodist Hymnal.
20. Britannica, ‘Hallelujah’.

4. Review of the Literature

The existing literature relevant to the expression הַלְלוּ־יְיָ may be divided into several principal research trajectories: classical Hebrew philology (grammatical and lexicographical), studies of the Psalter and its composition, research on the liturgical function of Hallel/Hallelujah formulae, Septuagintal analyses of the Greek form ἀλληλουϊά, as well as historical-liturgical investigations of the reception of the expression in Christian tradition. This classification demonstrates that the expression has been examined from multiple perspectives, yet most often in a fragmentary manner, without an integrated approach that would unify morphology, function, and discourse¹².

4.1. Classical Hebrew Philology: Etymology, Morphology, and Lexicography

The earliest and still foundational layer of scholarship consists of standard Hebrew grammars and lexica. In these works, הַלְלוּ־יְיָ is understood as an imperative construction composed of a plural *pi’el* imperative (הללו) and a shortened form of the divine name יְיָ ³⁴⁵. This approach has remained dominant from Gesenius, through BDB and HALOT, to more recent systematic grammars such as Joüon–Muraoka and Waltke–O’Connor.

In these works, the emphasis is placed primarily on morphological structure and the etymology of the root הלל, while the functional dimension of the expression is rarely examined in detail. In

other words, it is explained how the expression is formed, but not always how it functions within a concrete textual environment.

The lexicographical tradition further confirms the stabilized status of the expression. In standard lexica (BDB; HALOT), *hallelujah* is treated as a fixed unit with a clearly defined meaning. In the Serbian scholarly context, two dictionaries make a particularly important contribution:

- Stanojević, Ž. (2001) *Hebrejsko-srpski rečnik*, in which the entry “haleluja” is treated as a stabilized liturgical and theological unit⁶;
- Šomlo, A. (2007) *Hebrejsko-srpski rečnik*, which likewise records the expression as a fixed form in biblical and religious language⁷.

The presence of the expression in modern lexicography further confirms its full lexicalization, that is, its transition from a syntactic construction into a stable linguistic unit.

4.2. The Psalter as a Compositional and Liturgical Framework

A second major line of research consists of studies on the Psalter, its structure, and its function. Contemporary scholarship has clearly established that *hallelujah* does not occur randomly, but rather within clearly defined groups of psalms, particularly in the so-called Hallel psalms and in the concluding section of the Psalter (Ps 146–150)⁸⁹¹⁰.

Westermann (1981) emphasizes that the Psalms are organized through formulae that signal transitions between thematic units, while Gerstenberger (2001) highlights their liturgical function within communal worship¹¹¹². Alter (2007) further develops this perspective by emphasizing the poetic and aesthetic dimension of recurring expressions in Hebrew poetry¹³.

More recent studies of the Psalter likewise indicate that the final sequence of psalms (146–150) is structured around the repetition of the formula *hallelujah*, implying its role in the formation of a unified liturgical composition. In this context, the expression does not appear as an isolated word, but as part of a broader compositional system.

Nevertheless, despite these insights, the literature often remains at a descriptive level — noting where the expression occurs and how it is repeated, but less frequently engaging in a deeper analysis of its discourse function.

4.3. The Liturgical Function of the Expression in Judaism

A third line of research encompasses studies on Jewish liturgy and the tradition of the Hallel psalms. These studies demonstrate that Psalms 113–118 were used as a distinct liturgical unit in Jewish worship, particularly during festivals¹⁴¹⁵¹⁶.

In this context, *hallelujah* functions as an acclamation that accompanies or frames the liturgical act. This usage confirms that the expression is not merely a textual element, but also an integral part of ritual practice. Historical studies (e.g., Finkelstein 1950) suggest that the Hallel has deep roots in temple worship and collective religious practice¹⁷.

This implies that from its earliest stages, *hallelujah* was not merely a grammatical construction, but a functional unit of liturgical language.

4.4. The Septuagint and the Question of ἀλληλουϊά

Particular importance attaches to studies dealing with the Greek form ἀλληλουϊά in the Septuagint. In this tradition, the expression is not translated but transliterated, indicating its special status¹⁸¹⁹.

Research on this issue demonstrates that already in the Hellenistic period *hallelujah* was understood as an untranslatable formula. This represents a crucial moment in its history, marking the transition from the Hebrew language into an international religious context.

In other words, within the Septuagint the expression ceases to belong exclusively to a single language and becomes a translinguistic phenomenon.

4.5. Discourse Linguistics and the Function of the Formula

A fourth important line of research emerges from the field of discourse linguistics. Although *hallelujah* is rarely treated as a central object of analysis, the theoretical framework provided by Niccacci (1990) and Longacre (1996) makes it possible to understand it as a discourse marker²⁰²¹.

These scholars demonstrate that Semitic texts contain elements that serve to organize discourse rather than merely to convey meaning. In this context, recurring formulae perform functions such as:

- marking textual boundaries
- organizing structure
- guiding interpretation

It is precisely here that a key limitation of the existing literature becomes evident: although the liturgical function of the expression is recognized, its discourse role is rarely analyzed in a systematic manner.

4.6. Christian Reception and Liturgical Tradition

A substantial body of scholarship is devoted to the development of the expression within Christian tradition, particularly in the fields of liturgics and the history of church music. McKinnon (1996) traces the development of *alleluia* in early and medieval liturgy²², while later studies confirm its central role in Gregorian chant and broader liturgical practice.

This literature demonstrates that the expression did not lose its function upon its transition into Christianity, but rather expanded it further. In this way, *hallelujah* becomes one of the rare examples of an expression that has maintained continuity between Judaism and Christianity.

4.7. Domestic and Regional Context

In the regional scholarly context, systematic analysis of the expression *hallelujah* remains relatively limited. Nevertheless, significant contributions are made by lexicographical works, particularly the dictionaries of Stanojević (2001) and Šomlo (2007), which confirm that the expression is recognized as a stabilized unit within modern Hebrew studies⁶⁷.

The absence of more detailed studies in this context further justifies the need for a work that integrates philological, discourse, and liturgical approaches.

4.8. Research Gap and Contribution of the Study

The review of the literature demonstrates that:

- the morphological analysis of the expression is well developed
- its liturgical function is recognized
- its historical continuity is documented

However:

- its discourse function remains insufficiently theorized
- an integrated approach (morphology + liturgy + discourse) is lacking

It is precisely here that the contribution of the present study lies: it does not reject existing interpretations, but rather extends and connects them within a unified model, in which *hallelujah* is understood as:

- a morphological construction
- a liturgical formula
- a discourse marker

Footnotes

1. Brill (general DSS and Psalms studies overview).
2. Tov, E. (2012) Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible.
3. Gesenius, W. (1910) Hebrew Grammar.
4. Joüon, P. and Muraoka, T. (2006) A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew.
5. Waltke, B. K. and O'Connor, M. (1990) Biblical Hebrew Syntax.
6. Stanojević, Ž. (2001) Hebrejsko-srpski rečnik. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.19522850>
7. Šomlo, A. (2007) Hebrejsko-srpski rečnik.
8. Psalter studies (Book V structure).
9. JSTOR Psalms structural studies.
10. Psalms 146–150 research corpus.
11. Westermann, C. (1981) Praise and Lament in the Psalms.
12. Gerstenberger, E. (2001) Psalms.
13. Alter, R. (2007) The Book of Psalms.
14. Jewish Encyclopedia, 'Hallel'.
15. Britannica, 'Hallel'.

16. National Library of Israel, 'Hallel'.
 17. Finkelstein, L. (1950) The Origin of the Hallel.
 18. Pietersma, A. and Wright, B. (2007) Septuagint.
 19. LXX studies on Hallelujah.
 20. Niccacci, A. (1990) Syntax of the Verb.
 21. Longacre, R. (1996) Grammar of Discourse.
 22. McKinnon, J. (1996) Study of the Alleluia.
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5. Central Thesis and Methodological Framework of the Study

In the preceding chapters, it has been demonstrated that the expression הַלְלוּ־יְהוָה cannot be exhaustively explained solely through morphological and etymological analysis, nor through a descriptive account of its liturgical usage¹²³. The review of the literature has pointed to an important problem: although the basic components of the expression are well known, its functioning within the text has not been fully clarified at a theoretical level⁴⁵. For this reason, it is necessary to define clearly the central thesis and the methodological framework of this study.

5.1. Central Thesis

The central thesis of this study is as follows: the expression הַלְלוּ־יְהוָה in Biblical Hebrew does not function primarily as a free imperative syntagm, but rather as a stabilized liturgical formula that simultaneously performs a discourse, performative, and compositional function⁶⁷.

In other words, although the expression is formally constructed as an imperative, its function in the Psalter extends beyond the level of the sentence and enters the domain of textual organization⁸⁹. It does not operate solely at the level of the meaning of an individual word, but participates in the structuring of the entire discourse¹⁰.

This thesis presupposes three key assumptions:

First, the expression has undergone a process of lexicalization, whereby its grammatical structure remains recognizable, but no longer fully determines its function¹¹.

Second, the expression functions as a discourse marker, that is, as a signal marking the beginning, the end, or the boundaries of textual units within the Psalter¹²¹³.

Third, the expression possesses a performative dimension, since its utterance not only denotes the act of praise, but also realizes that act within a liturgical context¹⁴.

5.2. The Problem of Existing Interpretations

Traditional interpretations of the expression proceed from its morphological transparency and translate it as “praise Yah”¹²³. Such an approach is linguistically justified, but insufficient. It does

not explain why the expression appears precisely at certain positions in the text, nor why it exhibits a high degree of formal stability⁴⁵.

On the other hand, liturgical interpretations emphasize its role in worship, but often remain at the level of description and do not develop a precise theoretical model of its function within the text⁶⁷.

Discourse-oriented approaches, although well developed within contemporary linguistics, are rarely applied directly to this expression¹²¹³. As a consequence, a gap exists between morphological analysis, liturgical interpretation, and discourse theory.

The aim of this study is to bridge this gap by integrating these three approaches.

5.3. Methodological Approach

The methodology of this study is based on a combination of philological analysis, text linguistics, and a historical-liturgical approach¹²³¹²¹³.

Philological analysis includes the examination of the morphological structure of the expression, its etymological origin, and its usage in Biblical Hebrew¹²³. This part relies on standard grammars and lexica, as well as on a critical reading of the biblical text.

Text linguistics is employed to analyze the function of the expression within discourse¹²¹³. Within this framework, particular attention is given to its role in organizing the text, marking boundaries, and structuring psalms.

The historical-liturgical approach enables an understanding of the development of the expression over time, from its use in Jewish tradition to its transmission into Christian liturgical systems⁶⁷¹⁴.

The combination of these methods allows for a multi-layered analysis encompassing both the structure and the function of the expression.

5.4. Analytical Corpus

The analysis is based primarily on the texts of the Psalter, with particular focus on the psalms in which the expression הַלְלוּיְהוָה appears as an initial or final formula⁸⁹. Special attention is devoted to the final sequence of psalms, where the expression occurs with high frequency and clearly demonstrates its organizational role¹⁰.

In addition, other relevant texts in which similar liturgical formulae occur are taken into account, in order to enable comparison and a broader understanding of the phenomenon.

5.5. Discourse Function as the Key to Interpretation

One of the central methodological steps is the identification of the expression as a discourse marker¹²¹³. In text linguistics, discourse markers are elements that do not primarily carry lexical meaning, but rather organize the flow of the text and signal relationships between its parts.

In this sense, *hallelujah* may be understood as a signal that:

marks the beginning of a hymnic unit
closes a textual unit
or connects different parts of a psalm

Such an interpretation allows the expression to be viewed as a functional element of the text, rather than merely as part of its content.

5.6. The Performative Dimension of the Expression

In addition to its discourse function, the expression also possesses a clear performative dimension¹⁴. According to speech act theory, certain linguistic forms do not describe an action, but perform it. In this context, the utterance of *hallelujah* constitutes an act of praise.

This dimension is particularly important in a liturgical context, where language serves not only communication, but also the ritual realization of religious experience.

5.7. Expected Contribution of the Study

On the basis of the defined thesis and methodology, the expected contribution of the study may be identified on several levels.

At the linguistic level, the study offers a reinterpretation of the expression as a discourse marker¹²¹³.

At the philological level, the study confirms and expands existing interpretations of its morphological structure¹²³.

At the liturgical level, the study demonstrates the continuity between biblical usage and later religious traditions⁶⁷¹⁴.

At the theoretical level, the study proposes an integrated model that connects morphology, discourse, and liturgy.

5.8. Concluding Remarks on Methodology

The methodological framework of this study is based on the assumption that an interdisciplinary approach is necessary for an adequate understanding of the expression ¹²³¹²¹³הללויה. No single method can fully explain its complexity.

Only the combination of philological precision, discourse analysis, and historical-liturgical context enables an adequate interpretation of the expression and its place within the biblical text.

It is precisely such an approach that opens the possibility for a new interpretation, which will be developed in the following chapter through a detailed analysis of textual examples.

Footnotes

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6. Discourse and Textual Analysis of the Expression הַלְלוּ־יְהוָה in the Psalter

After establishing the etymological, morphological, and theoretical foundations of the expression הַלְלוּ־יְהוָה, as well as its historical and liturgical development, it is necessary to proceed to a concrete analysis of its function within the biblical text. The aim of this chapter is to empirically test the previously formulated thesis through the analysis of representative examples from the Psalter¹².

Particular attention is devoted to the position of the expression within the text, its distribution, frequency, and function within the poetic and liturgical structure³.

6.1. Positional Distribution of the Expression

One of the most striking characteristics of the expression הַלְלוּ־יְהוָה is its pronounced positional regularity. In a large number of psalms, the expression appears:

- at the beginning of the psalm
- at the end of the psalm
- or in both positions, thereby forming a framing structure⁴⁵

This distribution is not accidental. On the contrary, it indicates that the expression has an organizational function within the text. When it appears at the beginning, it acts as a signal for entry into hymnic discourse; when it occurs at the end, it functions as a concluding acclamation; and when it occupies both positions, it creates an *inclusio* structure that closes the textual unit⁶.

6.2. Psalm 104:35 as a Transitional Point

Psalm 104:35 represents the earliest instance in which the expression הַלְלוּ־יְיָ appears as a concluding formula⁷. Its position at the very end of the psalm indicates its function as a final acclamation.

This example is particularly significant because it demonstrates the transition from narrative-descriptive discourse to a liturgical conclusion. In other words, a text that describes divine creation and action does not end with a narrative statement, but with a call to praise⁸.

This confirms that the expression does not function merely as a grammatical unit, but as a discourse signal marking the conclusion of a thematic unit⁹.

6.3. Hallelujah Psalms (Ps 146–150)

The clearest example of the systematic use of the expression is found in the final sequence of the Psalter, Psalms 146–150^{10,11}. In these texts, the expression הַלְלוּ־יְיָ appears:

- at the beginning of each psalm
- at the end of each psalm
- and often within the text itself through the repetition of imperative forms¹²

This structure creates a powerful rhythmic and compositional effect. Each psalm functions as a self-contained unit, yet at the same time as part of a broader sequence. The repetition of the expression enables the linking of individual psalms into a unified liturgical composition¹³.

In this context, *hallelujah* does not function as an isolated word, but as an organizing principle.

6.4. The Function of *Inclusio*

One of the key phenomena in the analysis of the Psalter is the presence of *inclusio*, that is, the framing of a text by identical or similar expressions at its beginning and end¹⁴.

The expression הַלְלוּ־יְיָ often fulfills precisely this function. When it appears at both ends of a psalm, it:

- defines the boundaries of the text
- emphasizes the unity of its content
- guides reading and interpretation¹⁵

Such usage clearly indicates that the expression operates at the level of structure, not merely at the level of lexical meaning.

6.5. Repetition and Rhythmic Function

In addition to its positional function, the expression also plays a significant role in the creation of rhythm and the sonic structure of the text. Its phonetic form, with the repetition of sounds and a marked syllabic pattern, makes it particularly suitable for recitation and chanting¹⁶.

In Psalms 146–150, the repetition of imperative forms further intensifies this effect. This produces a progressive culmination, in which the call to praise expands and increases in intensity¹⁷.

This rhythmic dimension further confirms that the expression is not merely a bearer of meaning, but also a key element of poetic structure.

6.6. Discourse Marker and Text Organization

On the basis of the foregoing analysis, it may be concluded that the expression הַלְלוּ־יְיָ functions as a discourse marker¹⁸¹⁹. Its role is not to convey new information, but to organize the existing text.

In this sense, it signals:

- the beginning of discourse
- the end of discourse
- the transition between thematic units

Such a function is well known in text linguistics, where certain elements are used to structure discourse without directly contributing to lexical meaning¹⁹.

Hallelujah belongs precisely to this category.

6.7. The Performative Function in the Text

The expression also possesses a clear performative function. Its utterance not only calls for praise, but itself constitutes an act of praise²⁰.

In this sense, it functions as a speech act within liturgical discourse. This dimension is particularly important because it connects text and practice — what is written in the psalm becomes part of ritual performance.

6.8. Synthetic Conclusion of the Analysis

The analysis of the psalms demonstrates that the expression הַלְלֵי-יְהוָה has a multi-layered function encompassing:

- the structural level (organization of the text)
- the discourse level (marking of boundaries)
- the poetic level (rhythm and repetition)
- the liturgical level (ritual usage)

This combination of functions confirms the central thesis of the study: *hallelujah* is not merely an imperative construction, but a complex formula operating simultaneously on multiple levels.

6.9. Transition Toward the Conclusion of the Study

The results of this analysis provide the foundation for the final chapter, in which the key findings will be summarized and the overall contribution of the study will be defined.

On the basis of the foregoing, it is now possible to proceed to the formulation of the concluding section, which will integrate the philological, linguistic, and liturgical insights into a unified interpretation of the expression הַלְלֵי-יְהוָה.

Footnotes

1. Tov, E. (2012) *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
2. Zenger, E. (2005) *The Composition of the Psalter*. Leuven: Peeters.
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7. Discussion

The results of the conducted analysis indicate the need to reassess traditional interpretations of the expression הַלְלוּ־יְהוָה, particularly within classical Hebrew studies, Psalter scholarship, and liturgical interpretations. In this chapter, the results are brought into direct relation with the existing literature, with the aim of clearly defining the scholarly contribution of the study and its place within contemporary research¹².

7.1. Relation to Classical Hebrew Studies

Classical Hebrew scholarship consistently interprets the expression הַלְלוּ־יְהוָה as an imperative construction derived from the root הלל, combined with the shortened theophoric element יְהוָה³⁴⁵. Such an interpretation is linguistically well grounded and remains indispensable as the starting point for any further investigation.

However, the results of the present study demonstrate that this interpretation is not sufficient to explain the function of the expression within a concrete textual environment. The imperative interpretation accounts for the grammatical form, but not for its positional stability, its repetitive distribution, and its liturgical function in the Psalter⁶⁷.

In other words, classical Hebrew studies answer the question of how the expression is constructed, but not fully the question of how it functions. This study does not reject the traditional analysis, but extends it by introducing a level of discourse interpretation.

7.2. Relation to Psalter Studies

Studies of the Psalter have already identified the specific distribution of the expression *hallelujah*, particularly in the concluding psalms and within the so-called Hallel corpus⁸⁹¹⁰. Scholars such as Westermann and Gerstenberger emphasize the liturgical and structural role of recurring formulae, while Alter highlights their poetic and aesthetic significance¹¹¹²¹³.

The results of the present study confirm these insights, but further refine them. It has been demonstrated that the expression not only accompanies the structure of the psalm, but actively participates in its formation. It is not merely an accompanying element, but an organizing principle of the text.

In this way, the existing literature is complemented by a clearer definition of the function of the expression as a discourse marker, which has not always been explicitly theorized in previous studies.

7.3. Discourse Interpretation as the Central Contribution

The most significant contribution of this study lies in the introduction of a discourse-based interpretation of the expression הַלְלוּ־יְהוָה. Within text linguistics, discourse markers are elements that organize the flow of the text, mark its boundaries, and guide interpretation¹⁴¹⁵.

The application of this concept to *hallelujah* enables a new understanding of its function. Instead of being viewed exclusively as an imperative syntagm, the expression may be understood as a signal that:

- marks the beginning of a textual unit
- closes the discourse
- establishes a frame (inclusio)

Such an interpretation explains its high frequency in certain parts of the Psalter and its stable position within the text.

In this sense, the present study introduces a methodological shift: instead of analysis at the level of the word or sentence, the focus is transferred to the level of discourse.

7.4. Liturgical and Performative Implication

The discourse function of the expression cannot be separated from its liturgical dimension. As demonstrated by liturgical and historical studies, *hallelujah* has been part of communal worship from its earliest stages¹⁶¹⁷.

This study goes a step further by showing that the liturgical function is directly connected with its performative nature. In accordance with speech act theory, the utterance of the expression does not constitute a description, but an act — the act of praise¹⁸.

In this way, a connection is established between text and ritual. What is recorded in the Psalter as a formula becomes, in liturgy, an active practice.

This dimension further confirms that the expression belongs not only to language, but also to religious experience.

7.5. Integration of Findings and Theoretical Significance

By combining philological, discourse, and liturgical analysis, this study proposes an integrated model for understanding the expression הַלְלוּ־יְהוָה. Within this model, the expression is regarded as:

- a morphological construction
- a lexicalized unit
- a discourse marker
- a performative act

Such an approach makes it possible to overcome the fragmentation present in previous scholarship, in which these aspects have often been analyzed separately.

7.6. Limitations and Directions for Further Research

Although the study offers a new interpretative framework, certain questions remain open. In particular, more detailed quantitative studies of the distribution of the expression across the entire biblical corpus are needed, as well as comparisons with other liturgical formulae.

Further research may also include the analysis of parallel expressions in other Semitic languages, as well as a deeper study of its reception in different religious traditions.

7.7. Concluding Remarks on the Discussion

The discussion demonstrates that the expression הַלְלוּ־יְיָ cannot be adequately explained within a single methodological framework. Only an interdisciplinary approach allows for its full understanding.

In this sense, the present study does not represent a final point of research, but rather a foundation for further investigation of the relationship between language, text, and liturgy in the biblical context.

Footnotes

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8. Conclusion

The aim of this study has been to provide a comprehensive philological, linguistic, and liturgical analysis of the expression הַלְלוּ־יְהוָה (*hallelujah*), with particular emphasis on its function in the Psalter and its development across religious traditions¹². Starting from the etymological and morphological structure of the expression, through its distribution and function within the text, to its reception in Judaism and Christianity, it has been demonstrated that its meaning and role extend beyond the scope of classical grammatical analysis³⁴.

The analysis has confirmed that the expression formally belongs to the imperative structures of Biblical Hebrew, derived from the root הָלַל and combined with the shortened theophoric element יְהוָה⁵⁶. However, its behavior within the text — especially its stable position at the beginning and end of psalms — indicates that it has undergone a process of lexicalization and has become a fixed liturgical formula⁷.

Further analysis of the Psalter has shown that the expression possesses a clear structural function. Its distribution within the psalms, particularly in the final sequence (Ps 146–150), confirms that it acts as an organizing element that links individual texts into a unified compositional whole⁸⁹¹⁰. This confirms its role not only at the level of the sentence, but also at the level of the entire discourse.

Within the framework of discourse analysis, it has been demonstrated that הַלְלוּ־יְהוָה functions as a marker that signals textual boundaries and guides interpretation¹¹¹². Such a function corresponds to theoretical models in text linguistics, in which certain elements serve not primarily to convey meaning, but to organize discourse.

At the same time, the study has highlighted the pronounced performative dimension of the expression. In a liturgical context, *hallelujah* does not merely denote the act of praise, but realizes it, thereby belonging to the category of speech acts¹³. This characteristic connects linguistic structure with ritual practice and confirms that the expression operates at the intersection of language and liturgy.

From a historical perspective, the expression exhibits remarkable stability and continuity. Its transliteration in the Septuagint and its subsequent transmission into Christian traditions indicate its special status as an untranslatable sacred formula¹⁴¹⁵. This confirms that it is one of the rare expressions that has preserved both its form and its function across different languages and religious systems.

On the basis of the foregoing, the central conclusion of this study may be formulated as follows: the expression הַלְלוּ־יְהוָה represents a complex linguistic and liturgical unit that simultaneously functions as a morphological construction, a lexicalized formula, a discourse marker, and a performative act. Its adequate understanding is possible only through an integrated approach that combines philology, text linguistics, and the history of liturgy.

The contribution of this study lies in the systematic integration of these disciplines and in the proposal of an interpretative model that goes beyond the partial approaches found in previous

scholarship. In this way, the study opens the way for further research, particularly in the field of discourse analysis of biblical texts and the study of the relationship between language and ritual in religious traditions¹¹¹²¹³.

Footnotes

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