

4 1/2 Hebrew Words To Know For Holy Week

By Chad Bird

Reading Time: 3 mins

The Lord sees the blood of the Lamb upon us, but does not merely pass over us in mercy. He passes into us by grace.

Whether your native tongue is English, Icelandic, or Arabic, during Holy Week you'll share a handful of words in common with believers around the world. They are Hebrew words.

By them the Spirit tells us what the Son of the Father has done—and still does—for us. Together they encapsulate what Holy Week is all about.

Here are the 4 ½ Hebrew words to know and love as we prepare for Holy Week.

Palm Sunday: Hosanna

When Jesus rode into the holy city astride a donkey, the crowds morphed into a choir. “Hosanna to the son of David!” they sang.

This Hebrew word (pronounced *Ho-shee-ah-nah*) is more prayer than exclamation. It means, “Oh, save now!” or “Please, save now!”

The root or stem of the verb for “save” is *yasha*, which is also the root of the Hebrew name of Jesus, Yehoshua, which means “Yahweh saves” or “Yahweh is salvation.”

So in shouting, “Oh, save now!” to the Savior himself, it’s like we are saying, “Do for us who you are. ‘Jesus’ us. Save us!”

And so he does.

Jesus is the Father's answer to our Hosanna.

Maundy Thursday: Pesach

On the night Israel was left Egypt, the Lord’s angel passed over every home with a door painted with the blood of a lamb ([Exodus 12:27](#)). The Hebrew verb for “pass over” is *pasach*. This divine *pasach* is celebrated at the Pesach or Passover.

This festival has Jesus written all over it.

Christ our Passover has been sacrificed ([1 Cor 5:7](#)). The body of the Lamb of God, sacrificed on the cross, is fed to us in the supper that he instituted on Maundy Thursday. We eat the very price of our redemption.

As the entrances to the homes of the Israelites were painted with blood, so the entrance to our bodies--our mouths, our lips--are painted with Jesus.

The Lord sees the blood of the Lamb upon us, but does not merely pass over us in mercy. He passes into us by grace. He comes into our bodily homes not to destroy but to heal, to enliven, to forgive.

Good Friday: Golgotha

Jesus was crucified at a place named Golgotha, which means “the skull.” This word is the ½ part of the 4 ½ words. Golgotha is an Aramaic word, but the Hebrew word, *gulgoleth*, is its linguistic cousin. So we might say Golgotha is half-Hebrew, at least.

So why skull? On my recent trip to Israel, I visited both the Church of the Holy Sepulcher and the Garden Tomb, two of the sites that may have been where Jesus was crucified. Both of them claim that the skull-shaped rocks or rock formations, close at hand, are what Golgotha refers to.

But the ancient understanding of Golgotha is *not* that the site of the crucifixion was a skull-shaped hill. Rather, this was traditionally understood to be the place of *Adam's skull*, that is, his grave. Look at most icons of the crucifixion, for instance, and you'll see a skull buried beneath the cross of Jesus.

Those are not just any old bones; they're Adam's.

If this tradition is correct, the Last Adam, Jesus, is put to death over the grave of the first Adam. Just as the head of humanity brought death into the world at the tree of knowledge, so the Head of a New Humanity brings life into the world at the tree of the cross.

This Last Adam not only reverses what the first man did. We receive more in Jesus than we lost in Adam. His divine blood, dripping down from the cross, enlivens all of us who, in Adam, are buried there.

Holy Saturday: Shabbat

In the beginning, when God finished creating the world, he rested on the seventh day, a Saturday. This is the Sabbath (more precisely pronounced "Shabbat"), which is the Hebrew word for “rest.” In the OT, the Sabbath was the weekly remembrance not only of God's creative work ([Exod 20:11](#)), but his redeeming work ([Deut 5:15](#)).

Genesis (creation) and Exodus (redemption) are remembered thus every Sabbath.

Both creation and redemption coalesce in Jesus. Having finished all his work of redeeming the world, having completed his re-creation of humanity, he rested in the tomb of death on the seventh day.

“It is finished,” he said. His work was finished. So he took his rest. This was his Sabbath.

And it is a Sabbath with no conclusion. His resurrection ushers us into the Sabbath that creation has been awaiting since Genesis. We who are weak and heavy laden come to Jesus, and he Sabbaths us in himself.

Resurrection Sunday: Hallelujah

Since we have this Sabbath in Jesus, we cannot keep silent. Indeed, the Lord opens our lips so that our mouths may declare his praise ([Ps 51:15](#)). This praise of Yahweh is what Hallelujah means, literally, "Praise Yah!"

To praise the Lord does not merely mean to shout "Praise!" over and over, but to praise who he is, what he has done for us, and what he will do for us.

Every Sunday is a holy day for Hallelujahs, but Resurrection Sunday is the Holy of Holies for Hallelujah. We sing it, shout it, speak it, chant it. We "praise Yah" as we praise Jesus, for Jesus is Yahweh incarnate, Yahweh crucified, Yahweh resurrected.

Jesus is our embodied Hallelujah to the Father.

At the beginning of Holy Week, on Palm Sunday, we shout, "Hosanna! Oh, save now!" At the end of Holy Week, on Easter, we shout, "Hallelujah! Praise, Yah!" For our prayers are answered. Salvation is won for us in Christ.

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