

Selah

סֵלָה



The exact meaning of the word “*Selah*” is unknown.

It appears 3 times in the book of Habakkuk and 71 times in Psalms. There are many different ideas about its true

meaning, which are fun to speculate about, but ultimately you can choose for yourself which idea best fits. Some Bible translations relegate *Selah* to the footnotes, but it will help you enormously if you have a version with the word *Selah* in the text. In the sermon we looked at Psalm 62, but we will also be looking at Habakkuk’s prayer.

I think *Selah* probably means, “Think on this”, and if it doesn’t it is something close to that. As you read the passages, when you come to the word *Selah*, stop and ask yourself the questions numbered below.

Read Psalm 62 & Habakkuk 3

1. In your own words, what have you just read?
2. What idea or memory does the writer convey?
3. What does it tell us about our humanity, or about God’s sovereignty?

Habakkuk’s prayer seems to cry out from the aftermath of battle, but although the situation was bleak it was not hopeless. If we recall the events of our nation’s history we inevitably come to times of conflict, war and great loss. Even if there were victories, the cost of war in human lives lost and damaged forever was very great. So, there are times when it is right to stop and think on these things and focus our hope.

Deeper In

Most Bible footnotes brush over the word and tell us that “*Selah* is probably a musical term.” We don’t know what *shigionoth* means either, but as it only appears once (Hab 3:1) no one worries too much. The best speculation that I like is, that it means “drinking songs, sung to celebrate a victory”. It suggests that Habakkuk used a popular tune that perhaps trivialised battle to prayerfully reflect on the horrors of war.

Selah seems to lead us to think and pray. It appears far too often to be ignored. Some say *Selah*:

- Is a borrowed word from the Philistine language, possibly by King David. The Philistines spoke a language that eventual became the root of many European languages, including English. *Selah*, linguistically looks very similar to the Latin word Solo. *Selah* may mean “solo”.
- Is a break in the flow of the psalm to allow for “praise”. There are few problems with this idea. Sometimes *Selah* appears in prayers when praise is not the most appropriate action, and the Hebrew word for praise is *Yudah*. So, is *Selah* a musical term for praise?
- Is a shortened exclamation declaring blessing forever. So, *Selah* means (blessings) “forever”. In which case it is not a musical term to the musicians for them to play forever, but instead is an adoration of God. Its use is strangely inconsistent though, if it is a call to adore God, which is a weakness for this idea.

You can mix and match, or come up with your own idea. *Selah* does break the flow of the psalm in a way that sometimes we would do well to break the relentless flow of our lives. Just stop. Take time to reflect. Are there things in your life you need to consider, perhaps grieve over? Are there times when God has been at work and it was awesome? And now start to pray.