

## Synonyms for “God’s Word” in Psalm 119

Many significant words occur in Psalm 119.<sup>a</sup> Eight Hebrew words, synonyms for God’s Word, each recur 19-25 times, appearing in almost every one of the psalm’s 176 verses. In this chart, these Torah synonyms are listed by their frequency of use.

	Meaning	The psalmist’s response	The personal blessings
<p><b><i>torah</i></b></p> <p>In NASB: <i>law</i></p> <p>In Psalm 119 there are 25 occurrences of the Hebrew, “<i>torah</i>” (vv. 1, 18, 29, 34, 44, 51, 53, 55, 61, 70, 72, 77, 85, 92, 97, 109, 113, 126, 136, 142, 150, 153, 163, 165, and 174). NASB consistently translates it as “law” in Psalm 119, but in Proverbs, etc., it is often translated “instruction” or “teachings.”</p>	<p><i>Torah</i> is the dominant, controlling, overarching concept. As insight into God’s revelation, highlights the <b>Word’s wholeness, its teaching and direction for life, the word as living revelation</b>. The verb generally means to throw, but in the <i>hiphil</i> it means to teach. God gives His Law and teachings in order to give direction to the lives of those He loves. The psalmist notes that the <i>torah</i> is full of “wonderful things.” It is a crucial part of the “faithful way.”</p>	<p>The psalmist feels “burning <b>indignation</b>” toward those who forsake the <i>torah</i>. In contrast to the wicked, who forsake, forget, and break the Torah, the psalmist desires to <b>walk</b> in God’s law, <b>keep</b> it, and <b>observe</b> it. He has confidence because he has not forgotten or forsaken it. In fact, <b>he meditates on it, delights in it, loves it, and beholds wonderful things from it</b>. The psalmist values the <i>torah</i> more than silver or gold.</p>	<p>These attitudes toward <i>torah</i> lead to walking with a <b>blameless</b> life, freed from the consequences of following the false, wicked way. This life is <b>full of wonder and delight</b>, especially in the revelation of God’s compassion (v. 77). He knows that he would have “perished in his affliction” if not for the law being his delight (v. 92). Loving the law brings <b>great peace</b>, knowing that he will be kept from stumbling (v. 165).</p>
<p><b><i>dabar</i></b></p> <p>In NASB: <i>word, words, (answer)</i></p> <p>Psalm 119 uses the Hebrew, “<i>dabar</i>” 24 times. NASB translates it as “word” or “words” in vv. 9, 16, 17, 25, 28, 42 (cf. also “answer”), 43, 49, 57, 65, 74, 81, 89, 101, 105, 107, 114, 130, 139, 147, 160, 161, and 169. The translation “answer,” in v. 42, concerns the psalmist’s response, not God’s Word. Since the NASB also translates the Hebrew word <i>imrah</i> by word, words, these must be distinguished.</p>	<p><i>Dabar</i> is the common, general word for speaking or a thing said. As insight into God’s revelation, <i>dabar</i> highlights the <b>act of personal speaking</b> (while, <i>imrah</i>, from the verb <i>amar</i>, to speak, focuses on the thing said).</p>	<p>The psalmist <b>keeps</b>, and promises to keep, what God speaks; he <b>does not forget</b> it. What God speaks becomes the basis for his confidence: he rises early and <b>cries out</b> for help; then he <b>trusts</b> in what God has spoken and <b>waits</b> for its promises, asking God to remember what He has said. He <b>believes</b> that what God has spoken has been “settled in heaven;” it is everlasting truth (v. 89, 160). The psalmist does not stand in awe of the power of princes who persecute, but he <b>stands in awe</b> of God’s spoken words (v. 161).</p>	<p>Keeping that which God speaks leads to <b>a life that is pure</b> (v. 9). God’s speaking <b>revives his soul</b> that was cleaving to the dust (v. 25) and <b>strengthens his soul</b> that is full of grief (v. 28). Trusting God’s speech (<i>dabar</i>) <b>equips him with an answer (dabar)</b> to reproach (v. 42). The promises expressed in God’s speech give the psalmist <b>hope</b> (v. 49). The psalmist has the experience of looking back on his life and discovering that <b>God has dealt well</b> with him, just as He has said He would (“according to His word,” v. 65). He has the confidence that others who fear God will be encouraged by how he has waited for what God has promised (v. 74). The word <b>provides light</b> to illumine the paths he walks (v. 105, 130).</p>

<sup>a</sup> “Your” is one of the most frequent and significant words of the Psalm (cf. “Your salvation, ...lovingkindness, ...mercies, ...compassion, ...favor; Your faithfulness, ...righteousness; Your hands, ...mouth, ...face; Your name, You Yourself, Him”). That which is God’s brings “blessing” and the one who is God’s receives “blessing.” The psalmist refers to himself as “Your servant.” The psalm frequently parallels God Himself or one of His personal qualities related to salvation. The word “way” has 11 occurrences; “ways” 7 occurrences. The Hebrew, “*derek*” refers to overall path of life. God’s ways are “blameless,” “established,” “pure,” and “faithful;” they are also “sought,” and “regarded.” “My ways” (4) or “his way” (1) is compared or contrasted with “Your ways” (2) or “His ways” (1). The “false way” (3) or “evil way” (1) is something that the psalmist prays to be kept from. There are “wonderful things from Your law, v. 18; “meditate on Your wonders,” v. 27, “Your testimonies are wonderful,” v. 127.

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	Meaning	The psalmist’s response	The personal blessings
<p><b><i>edah</i></b></p> <p><b>In NASB:</b> <i>testimonies, testimony</i></p> <p>In Psalm 119 there are 24 occurrences of the Hebrew, “<i>edah</i>” and “<i>edot</i>.” NASB translates as “testimonies” in vv. 2, 14, 22, 24, 31, 36, 46, 59, 79, 88, 95, 99, 111, 119, 125, 129, 138, 144, 146, 152, 157, 167, and 168; “testimony” in v. 86. It is paired with “statutes” in Deuteronomy (4:45; 6:17, 20).</p>	<p><i>Edah</i>, as insight into God’s revelation, highlights the Word’s soundness, its dependable and clear witness to what is true, the underlying evidence in support of its warnings and promises. With <i>choq</i> and <i>imrah</i>, it focuses on the written Word.</p>	<p>The psalmist “rejoices in their way,” “observes” them, “meditates” on them, “speaks of them” before kings, “turns his feet” to them, “delights” in them, “considers” them, “diligently keeps” them from the soul, and “loves” them “exceedingly.” Those who fear God are equated with those who know them (v. 79). As God’s servant, understanding is required in order to know them (v. 125).</p>	<p>Responding to God’s <i>edah</i> makes him “blessed.” He is confident that reproach and contempt will be taken away from him and that he will not be ashamed before kings when he speaks of them. People turn to him because they fear God in knowing His testimonies. He is protected from enemies who diligently seek to destroy him. They are associated with the removal of the wicked from the earth (v. 119).</p>
<p><b><i>mishpatim</i></b></p> <p><b>In NASB:</b> <i>ordinances, judgments, judgment, justice, manner</i></p> <p>In Psalm 119 there are 23 occurrences of the Hebrew, “<i>mishpat</i>.” NASB translates as ordinances, 16x (vv. 13, 20, 30, 39, 43, 52, 62, 91, 102, 106, 108, 156, 160, 164, 175); judgments, 4x (vv. 7, 75, 120, 137); judgment, 1x (v. 84); justice, 1x (v. 121); manner, 1x (v. 132).</p>	<p><i>Mishpat</i> is an Old Testament conception very near to the New Testament concept of <i>agape</i>. <i>Mishpat</i>, as insight into God’s revelation, highlights the decisions of leaders in their work to encourage justice in the community. The case laws of Israel came from this need for love; the judges made their decisions as encouragements toward love. These encouragements toward love are righteous (vv. 7, 75, 137) and good (v. 39); they align closely with God’s lovingkindness, mercy, grace, and truth (cf. parallels in vv. 132, 149, 156, 160).</p>	<p>The psalmist is grateful for <i>mishpatim</i> (vv. 7, 62). He longs to be encouraged and longs to give encouragement to others. Knowing his need and having chosen to live for love, he keeps this encouragement before his face (v. 30). He waits for them (to have an impact; v. 43). He longs to have his enemies held up to this standard of love (cf. “execute judgment,” v. 84). The psalmist recognizes that all that exists “stands” on the basis of this encouragement to love (v. 91). He does not “turn aside” from it, because he recognizes it as a personal teaching from God (v. 102, 108). He stands in fear of God because of these encouragements (v. 120); he desires God to treat him by this standard (v. 132). The standard of love is worthy of praise seven times a day (vv. 164, 175).</p>	<p>Meditating on the <i>mishpatim</i> takes away his dread of reproach and oppression (v. 39, 84, 121); when he remembers them he is comforted (v. 52). The encouragements toward love include the disciplines of affliction (v. 75). They cause all things to “stand” (v. 91). They revive his soul (vv. 149, 156).</p>

	Meaning	The psalmist's response	The personal blessings
<p><b><i>mitsvah</i></b></p> <p>In NASB: <i>commandments, commandment</i></p> <p>In Psalm 119 there are 21 occurrences of the Hebrew, “<i>mitsvah</i>.” NASB translates as “commandments” (vv. 6, 10, 19, 21, 32, 35, 47, 48, 60, 66, 73, 86, 98, 115, 127, 131, 143, 151, 166, and 172); “commandment” (v. 96).</p>	<p><i>Mitsvah</i>, as insight into God’s revelation, highlights the right to give specific direction and to encourage a response; it directs. (“The word emphasizes the straight authority of what is said; not merely the power to convince or persuade, but the right to give orders” (Kidner, 418). The commands are faithful (v. 86) and true (v. 151). They are beyond limitation (“exceedingly broad, v. 96). Together, all of the commands give a clear picture of righteousness (v. 172).</p>	<p>The psalmist looks on what God commands (v. 6). More than this, knowing they are hidden (to the natural man), he seeks them with all his heart (v. 10, 19) and runs to them (v. 32), hastens toward them (v. 60), and pants for them with longing (v. 131). He delights in the path laid out by God’s commands (v. 35), loves them (47, 48, 127), and wants to sing of them (v. 172). He believes they are relevant to his deeper needs (v. 66) and as a creature fashioned by God he desires to understand them (v. 73). He has come to appreciate that they are beyond limit, “exceedingly broad” (v. 98). The psalmist does them out of a hope for salvation (v. 166).</p>	<p>The one who is open to God’s <i>mitsvah</i>, to what God commands, will not be ashamed when he understands them (v. 6). He will be kept from wandering (v. 10). They help him cope with being a stranger to the earth (v. 19) and with being troubled and anguished (v. 143). They enlarge his heart (v. 32). They prompt a desire for wisdom that will address deeper needs (v. 66). They make him wiser than his enemies (v. 98). They bring God near (v. 151). They bring hope for salvation (v. 166).</p>
<p><b><i>choq</i></b></p> <p>In NASB: <i>statutes</i></p> <p>Psalm 119 uses the Hebrew, “<i>choq</i>” 21 times. NASB consistently translates as “statutes” (vv. 5, 8, 12, 23, 26, 33, 48, 54, 64, 68, 71, 80, 83, 112, 117, 118, 124, 135, 145, 155, and 171. NIV translates <i>choq</i> as “decrees”.</p>	<p><i>Choq</i> derives from the practice of scratching, engraving, or writing—to engrave laws on slabs of stone or metal and set them up in public. <i>Choq</i>, as insight into God’s revelation, highlights the public, permanent, and binding—the practical application to everyday life. With <i>edah</i> and <i>imrah</i>, it focuses on the written Word.</p>	<p>The psalmist commits to keeping them (vv. 5, 8, 33, 112, 117, 145). He wants God to teach him the statutes and their “way” (vv. 12, 26, 33, 64, 71, 124, 135, and 171), recognizing them as an expression of God’s lovingkindness (vv. 124, 135). He meditates on them (v. 23, 48). The psalmist loves them (v. 48) and wants to sing of them at the public assemblies (v. 54). He prays to be blameless in them (v. 80). He does not forget them, even in trial (v. 83). They are worthy of praise (v. 171).</p>	<p>The <i>choq</i> of God teach the psalmist about God’s lovingkindness (v. 64) and goodness (v. 68). The psalmist came to appreciate afflictions as the disciplines that encouraged him to learn God’s statutes (v. 71). They make him blameless, guarding him from public shame (v. 80). They help the psalmist understand God’s rejection and unwillingness to save those who deceitfully wander from them (they are “useless” and “wicked” vv. 118, 155).</p>
<p><b><i>piqqudim</i></b></p> <p>In NASB: <i>precepts</i></p> <p>Psalm 119 uses the Hebrew “<i>piqqudim</i>” 21 times (4, 15, 27, 40, 45, 56, 63, 69, 78, 87, 93, 94, 100, 104, 110, 128, 134, 141, 159, 168, and 173). The only OT occurrences outside Psalm 119 are also in the Psalms (19:8, 103:18, and 111:7).</p>	<p><i>Piqqudim</i> comes from a verb (<i>poqed</i>) that means to attend to closely for the purpose of taking appropriate actions. It is used of overseers and commanders. So <i>piqqudim</i>, as insight into God’s revelation, highlights the detailed, thorough instructions of a caring overseer. These caring instructions are “right, rejoicing the heart” (Psalm 19:8) and are, paralleled with “truth and justice,” “sure” (Psalm 111:7).</p>	<p>The psalmist recognizes these caring instructions as ordained to be kept diligently (vv. 4, 63) and observed (vv. 56, 69), not forgotten (v. 141). The psalmist meditates on them, desires to understand them, longs for them, seeks them, and loves them (v. 15, 27, 40, 45, 78, 159). He finds true companionship only with those who seek God and keep His caring instructions (v. 63). Arrogant liars may reject the caring instructions of God, but the psalmist finds protection from them in the caring instruction of God (vv. 69, 78, 87). He esteems them (hating the false way; v. 128).</p>	<p>The <i>piqqudim</i>, precepts, allow him to “walk at liberty” (v. 45). They give him true companions (v. 63). They revive him and save him (vv. 93, 94). They give him understanding, helping him to hate the false way (vv. 100, 104, 128) and avoid the snares of the wicked (v. 110, 141). They give him confidence, because he knows God will revive those who love them and choose them (vv. 159, 173).</p>

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	Meaning	The psalmist’s response	The personal blessings
<p><b><i>imrah</i></b></p> <p><b>In NASB:</b> <i>word, words</i></p> <p>In Psalm 119 there are 19 occurrences of the Hebrew, “<i>imrah</i>” (cf. <i>amar</i>, to say). NASB consistently translates as word, or words (vv. 11, 38, 41, 50, 58, 67, 76, 82, 103, 116, 123, 133, 140, 148, 154, 158, 162, 170, 172). Most occurrences are here in Psalm 119. Since <i>dabar</i> is also translated as word, words by NASB, the two must be distinguished.</p>	<p><i>Imrah</i>, as insight into God’s revelation, highlights <b>the things that He says, the promises</b> (the close synonym <i>dabar</i> focuses on the speaking). The psalmist sees these words as “sweeter than honey” (v. 103). It is a “righteous word” (v. 123) and “very pure” (v. 140) . With <i>edah</i> and <i>choq</i>, it focuses on the written Word.</p>	<p>The psalmist <b>treasures</b> what God says (v. 11) and <b>rejoices</b> over it as over great spoil (v. 162). He <b>seeks the favor</b> that he learns from what God says. Having experienced His discipline, he <b>keeps</b> what God says (v. 67). He <b>longs</b> for the salvation that comes from God’s righteous sayings (v. 123). He <b>loves</b> the pure word. He <b>anticipates</b> the times when he can <b>meditate</b> on it (v. 148). He <b>loathes</b> the treacherous, who do not keep what God says (v. 158). He <b>desires to sing praises</b> over the righteousness of what God says (v. 172).</p>	<p>Because of the psalmist’s attitude toward what God says, he is <b>kept from sin</b> (vv. 11, 67) and the dominion of iniquity (v. 133). He is <b>made reverent</b> (v. 38), encouraged that God will save him in lovingkindness (v. 41), <b>revived and comforted in affliction</b> (vv. 50, 67, 82, 154). He <b>comes to expect God to treat him with favor and grace</b> (v. 58). What God says gives the psalmist the <b>hope</b> that sustains life (v. 116) and brings <b>salvation</b> (v. 123, 170).</p>