

# The Doctrine of Sîyach

**Introduction:** In order for us to understand the tenor of this psalm, we need to know if David is asking God merely to hear his *prayer* or to hear his *complaint* to God. Therefore, we must examine the Hebrew word *sîyach*.

Topics		
Pronunciation and Spelling	Meanings	An Examination of All Scriptural Occurrences
	Conclusion	
Charts, Maps and Doctrines		
An Examination of All Scriptural Occurrences		

1. **Pronunciation and spelling:** masculine singular noun (usually found with the 3<sup>rd</sup> person masculine singular suffix) *sîyach* (סִיַּח) [pronounced *SEE-ahkh*]. This word and its cognates are found only in Hebrew poetry.
2. **Meanings** already attributed to :
  - a. KJV renderings: *complaint, meditation, communication, prayer, babbling*.
  - b. Strong's renderings: *a contemplation; by implication an utterance: - babbling, communication, complaint, meditation, prayer, talk* (Strong's #7879)
  - c. BDB translations: *complaint; musing; anxiety, trouble; talk* (BDB #967).
  - d. Gesenius translations: *a shrub, a bush* (different Strong's #7880, but with the same spelling<sup>1</sup>); *speech, discourse; quarrel; mediation*.<sup>2</sup>
3. **Cognates:**
  - a. Feminine noun: *sîychâh* (סִיַּחָה) [pronounced *see-KHAW*], which means, *meditation, communication*. This word is only found in Job 15:4 Psalm 119:97, 99. In Psalm 119, there is no way that this means *complaint* or *prayer*. Its verbal cognate means *to communicate*, therefore, some form of communication is involved. However, the psalmist calls God's Law and His testimonies his *sîychâh* all day long—therefore, it would be reasonable for this to mean *meditation, study, Bible study*—it is God's communication to man. The passage in Job would also allow for this understanding. Bera in mind that the feminine cognate of a verb may take on some meanings, and the masculine may take on the others. One may be very material and the other more conceptual. Strong's #7881 BDB #967.
  - b. Both of these nouns come from the verb *sîyach* (סִיַּח) [pronounced *SEE-ahkh*], which means *to communicate, to declare, to speak of, to talk about; to meditate* and possibly *to complain*; and this word is found primarily in poetry (Judges 5:10 Job 7:11 Psalm 119:15, 23, 27). There are times when this word clearly means *to communicate* (Judges 5:10 Job 12:8 Prov. 6:22). Strong's #7878 BDB #967. It would do us well to examine this verb further:
    - i. Where this verb could mean *to meditate, to study*: I Chron. 16:9 Psalm 105:2 119:148. Where *to meditate, to study* are the only reasonable meanings: Psalm 77:12 119:15, 23, 27, 48, 78, 148 143:5 145:5.
    - ii. Where this verb could mean *to communicate, to declare, to speak of*: Judges 5:10 I Chron. 16:9 (the context really seems to be one of communication) Job 7:11 12:8 Psalm 55:17 69:12 (favored by context) 105:2 (context favors this rendering). Where these meanings would be the only reasonable meanings: Judges 5:10 Job 12:8 Prov. 6:22. Note: all of the Qal imperatives are found here.

<sup>1</sup> This understanding of the word can be found in Gen. 2:5 21:15 Job 30:4, 7.

<sup>2</sup> H. W. F. Gesenius, *Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament*; ©1979 by Baker Books; p. 789.

- iii. Where this verb could mean *to complain*: Job 7:11 Psalm 55:17 69:12. Where *to complain* is the only reasonable meaning: nowhere. In Job 7:11, the verb could easily be rendered *to communicate, to declare*, and the communication could be seen as a *complaint*.
  - iv. Passages where any one of these three meanings would work: Psalm 77:3, 6 (however, Psalm 77:12 most likely means *to meditate, to study*) Isa. 53:8 (however, *to communicate, to study; to consider* would be the most reasonable renderings).
4. **Passages:** I Sam. 1:16 I Kings 18:27 II Kings 9:11 Job 7:13 9:27 10:1 21:4 23:2 Psalm 55:2 64:1 102 title 104:34 142:2 Prov. 23:29.

In our study of Psalm 142:2, Barnes questioned that this word meant *complaint*, which led me to question the same thing. I have a great deal of respect for Barnes, even though I don't always agree with him. Obviously, the easy way out would have been to take a stand without examining this; however, that is a piss-poor way of dealing with God's Word.

### An Examination of All Scriptural Occurrences of the Word

First, and most importantly, the verbal cognate in the Qal can reasonably be associated with the three sets of meanings: *to communicate, to declare; to meditate, to study; to complain*. However, we do not have a single instance where the verb would have to be rendered *to complain*, only a handful of passages where such a rendering would not cause a problem with the context.

Passage	Morphology and Additional Comments
I Sam. 1:16: <b>Do not consider your maidservant a base woman because of the abundance of my <b>complaint</b> and my frustration [or, <i>emotional state</i>] I have spoken until now.</b>	Although we could certainly render <i>sîyach</i> in this passage as <i>my complaint</i> , it could also render translated <i>my communication, my speaking, my prayer</i> .
I Kings 18:27: <b>At noon, Elijah began to mock them, saying, "Call out with a loud voice, for he is a god; either he is <b>communicating</b> or he's stepped out or he's on a journey or perhaps he is asleep and needs to be awakened."</b>	The context of this is, Baal was not responding to his prophets, so Elijah chides them as to what he might be up to, since he is a god. His first suggestion is that Baal is <i>communicating, praying, meditating, studying</i> or <i>complaining</i> . Unfortunately, the context does not allow us to tie this down further, although <i>praying</i> is probably not a reasonable rendering. The idea is that Baal is otherwise occupied, and therefore, cannot respond immediately to his prophets.
II Kings 9:11b: <b>And he said to them, "You know very well the man and his <b>talk</b>."</b>	In the context, <i>communication</i> is the key; <i>meditation</i> would make no sense; <i>complaint</i> would be a possible rendering, however (although Elisha, the one referred to, wasn't complaining, the king could have still said that he was).
Job 7:13: <b>"If I say, 'My bed will comfort me; my couch will hear my <b>complaint</b>.' "</b>	Although <i>my communication</i> would be a reasonable rendering, <i>my complaint</i> more accurately communicates Job's feelings.
Job 9:27a: <b>"Though I say, I will forget my <b>complaint</b>..."</b>	As above.
Job 10:1: <b>"I loathe my own life. I will give full vent to my <b>complaint</b>. I will speak in the bitterness of my soul."</b>	<i>My complaint</i> is the only reasonable rendering here.
Job 21:4a: <b>"As for me, is my <b>complaint</b> to man?"</b>	Although <i>my communication</i> would work here, <i>my complaint</i> seems to be a better fit.

Passage	Morphology and Additional Comments
Job 23:2a: "Even my <b>complaint</b> is rebellion."	Here, we could get away with <i>my prayer</i> , <i>my communication</i> .
Every instance of this word's use in the book of Job is by Job.	
Psalm 55:2: Listen to me and answer me. I am restless in my <b>complaint</b> and definitely distracted.	David could mean <i>my communication</i> , but <i>my complaint</i> is a better fit.
Psalm 64:1a: Hear my voice, O God, in my <b>complaint</b> .	<i>My communication</i> would also be a reasonable translation.
Psalm 102 title: A Prayer of the Afflicted, when he is faint, and pours out his <b>complaint</b> before Jehovah:	Again, although <i>my communication</i> is reasonable, <i>complaint</i> or <i>concern</i> better communicate the speaker's feelings.
Psalm 104:34: Let my <b>mediation</b> be pleasing to Him. As for me, I will be glad in Jehovah.	Although <i>my communication</i> would also work here, <i>my complaint</i> just would not.
Psalm 142:2: I will pour out my <b>complaint</b> before Him; I will declare my trouble before Him.	Given the second half of this verse, <i>complaint</i> or <i>concern</i> communicate David's thoughts better than <i>declaration</i> , <i>communication</i> .
Prov. 23:29: Who has woes? Who has sorrow? Who has contentions? Who has <b>complaining</b> ? Who has wounds without cause? Who has redness of eyes?	Quite obviously, this is stronger than simply a <i>declaration</i> or a <i>communication</i> . Given the other words of this passage, even a <i>vocalized concern</i> might be too weak.
Although we could probably get away with generally rendering <i>sîyach</i> as a <i>voiced concern</i> , even that seems a bit too weak for the passages in Job. My thinking would be that this noun (and verb) went through a transformation over the years. In Job's day, <i>sîyach</i> meant <i>complaint</i> ; however, this became a vocalized concern and then simply a <i>communication</i> . Since <i>communication</i> works both ways, this also has a more passive sense, where the person receives the communication; in other words, he <i>studies</i> or <i>meditates</i> .	

5. **Conclusion:** the verb and noun can both be consistently rendered *to complain (complaint)* for the passages of Job, which is very early Hebrew. However, this verb (and noun) came to mean *to voice a concern*, *to communicate*, *to declare* and, in a passive sense, *to mediate*, *to study*.