

Acrostic Psalms

We can learn the aleph-bet by examining various Biblical passages which are written as acrostics (alphabetically ordered verses and each first word commencing with each Hebrew letter of the alphabet in turn, from 1 through to 22). Psalm 119 is a famous example, written with 8 verses for each of the Hebrew consonants in order, so verses 1-8 each have a first word beginning with 'aleph and verses 9-16 each have a first word beginning with beth, and so on.

Acrostic passages occur in the following Psalms:

Psalm 9	2 verses for each of the 22 Hebrew consonants
Psalm 10	2 verses each
Psalm 25	1 verse each
Psalm 34	1 verse each
Psalm 37	2 verses each
Psalm 111	½ verse each
Psalm 112	½ verse each
Psalm 119	8 verses each
Psalm 145	1 verse each

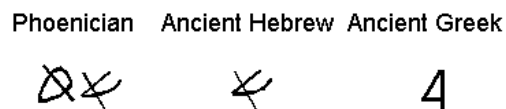
Additional acrostics chapters can be found in Lamentations and Proverbs.

The Significance of 22

As early as the 1st & 2nd centuries B.C. the Jews noted that 22 was significant in not just being the number of letters in the Hebrew alphabet but also the number of generations from Adam to Jacob (Israel), the number of works of creation, and the number of books in the Jewish canon of the Bible. (Sources: Josephus; the book of Jubilees 2.23; cf. Kabbalah)

Picture Letters

The first Hebrew letter, 'Aleph, originally represented an ox head and was similarly portrayed in Phoenician and Ancient Greek as well as Ancient Hebrew.



The name for the first letter, 'âleph is the same as the Hebrew word 'eleph which signifies an ox. This probably derives from two ideas, firstly from 'êl which means 'strong' or 'mighty' and as such is used of God, hence of the ox because of its strength. Secondly, in derivation from 'âlah which is a primary verbal root meaning to 'associate with', 'be familiar with', 'be accustomed to' and as such was

used of friendship, taming, joining together (hence as a numeral, '1000', and a 'famiy') and of learning by association.

THE CHARACTERS AND THEIR PICTURE-IMAGES

Character	Name	Original Picture Symbolism
א	<i>'Aleph</i>	ox head, yoke, learn
ב	<i>Beth</i>	house, tent
ג	<i>Gimel</i>	camel's neck, soul
ד	<i>Dáleth</i>	door, curtain to tent
ה	<i>Hê</i>	window, lattice
ו	<i>Wâw or vâv</i>	hook, nail, peg
ז	<i>Zayin</i>	weapon
ח	<i>Cheth</i>	hedge, fence, surround, gird
ט	<i>Teth</i>	serpent, snake, roll, curve
י	<i>Yodh</i>	hand (bent)
כ	ך <i>Kaph</i>	wing, palm (hollow of the hand)
ל	<i>Lâmedh</i>	ox goad, correction, learning
מ	ם <i>Mem</i>	waves, water
נ	ן <i>Nun</i>	fish (tadpole?), snake
ס	<i>Sâmekh</i>	prop, support
ע	<i>'Ayin</i>	eye
פ	ף <i>Pê</i>	mouth
צ	ץ <i>Tsâdhe</i>	fish hook? tool for cutting down?
ק	<i>Qoph</i>	axe, monkey, back of the head
ר	<i>Resh</i>	head
ש	ש <i>Sin, Shin</i>	tooth
ת	<i>Tâw</i>	sign, branded cross, mark, 'T'