

# More Than a Simple "Thank You"



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Most of us like it when we feel valued. It feels good to know when others appreciate us. So, to be kind, we show gratitude to others.

A simple way to thank someone in Hebrew is תודה (todah): “Thanks!” The underlying verb, which expresses “giving thanks” הודה (hodah) appears all over the Hebrew Bible. As a noun, the term means “thanksgiving” and is used with reference to the “thanksgiving offering” (זבח תודה; zevach todah) in the context of worship. Based on this context, English translations may render todah as “praise.” In Ezra 3:11, the priests sing as the foundations of the destroyed temple are rebuilt. After one group began the song, another “answered in phrases and thanksgivings to Adonai” (ויַעֲנוּ וּבְהוֹדוֹת לַיהוָה וּבְהַלֵּל וּבְהַלְלֵי אֱלֹהֵי אֲדֹנָי; *vaya’anu behallel uv’hodot l’Adonai*). In Psalm 28:7, the psalmist says, “My heart will rejoice and in my song I will thank you” (וַיַּעַלְז לִבִּי וּמְשִׁירֵי אֲהוֹדְנֶנּוּ; *ya’aloz libi umishiri ahodenu*). Expressing gratitude, thanks, and praise for God is a common activity in the Bible.

It’s important to know, however, that the more basic root undergirding these words is יָדָה (yadah), which means to “throw” or “cast”—to show something as if to point with an extended “hand” יָד (yad). In terms of announcing thanksgiving, the root suggests the idea of “speaking forth,” “admitting,” or “confessing.” According to Proverbs 28:13, one who hides transgression will not prosper, but “one who confesses (יָדָה; yadah) and abandons [them] will find mercy” (וּמִוֹדָה וְעָזַב יִרְחַם; *umodeh veozav yeruham*).

The theme of gratitude is not obvious here, but it is present. The meaning of praise can be observed, but we must actively imagine someone lifting hands in a motion of gratitude to see such a meaning. In Genesis 29:35, when Leah gives birth to her fourth son, she declares, “it is time to thank Adonai” (הַפַּעַם אֹדְהָ אֶת־יְהוָה; *hapa’am odeh Adonai*). And therefore, she named her son “Judah” (יְהוּדָה; *Yehudah*) because of her “gratitude” הוֹדָה (hodah). It just so happens, then, that the terms “Judeans” or “Jews” (יְהוּדִים; *yehudim*) come from the same root יָדָה (yadah): “thanksgiving.”

It turns out that a simple “thank you” is not so simple! So much more is implied in this short Hebrew word if we explore its origins and ancient context: images of hands being lifted up, offerings, confessions, gratitude stemming from God’s blessings, and songs that ring in our hearts. Gratitude is a profound action, and a fitting response to a life in the Lord.