

## תִּפְלָה, *tiplâ*

### Introduction

Grammatical type: n.f.

Occurrences: Total 3× OT (Jr 23.13; Jb 1.22; 24.12), 0× Sir, 0× Qum, 0× inscr.

A.1 There are no occurrences outside the biblical text. All the attestations of *tplh* in the Qumran texts relate to *tēpillâ* “prayer”.

Text Doubtful:

A.1 [nil]

B.1 In Jb 24.12 the Pesh presupposes a *Vorlage tēpillâ* (so also two Hebrew MSS: cf. BHS; Pope <sup>3</sup>1973:178). For many scholars (see e.g. Dhorme 1926; Driver-Gray n.d.: Part I, 209; Part II, 10, 169; Clines 1989; Schökel: 804) this is the correct reading: “God does not hear their prayer”. *tēpillâ* is, however, clearly a *lectio facilior*: *tiplâ*, which is plausible in its context (*TWAT* VIII, 730), is furthermore confirmed by Theodotion (ἄφροσύνη), Symmachus (μωρία) and, indirectly, by the Targum *ḥwb*’ (which excludes *tēpillâ*; v. infra 4. Versions f. Targum A.3).

B.2 For the occurrence in Jb 1.22 various emendations have been proposed, among which עולה “injustice, unrighteousness, wrong”, נבלה “folly” (see Pope <sup>3</sup>1973:178; Driver-Gray n.d.:11), or, with a different vocalisation, *tēpillâ*, in the meaning not attested elsewhere of “protest” (cf. Driver-Gray n.d.:10). The reading *tiplâ* is nevertheless entirely acceptable (v. infra 6. Exegesis A.5).

B.3 In Ps 109.4 the reading *tiplâ* has been proposed in place of the *tēpillâ* of MT (see *HAL*: 1635a; Propp 1990:405): this reading, however, does not make the understanding of the text any easier.

Distribution in the historical and functional languages (Sciumbata 1996-97:277):

EBH <sub>2</sub>	1	(Jr 23.13)
LBH <sub>1</sub>	1	(Jb 1.22)
LBH <sub>3</sub>	1	(Jb 24.12)

Total EBH 1

Total LBH 2

Overall total: 3

### 1. Root and Comparative Material

A.1 *tplh* is connected with a root *tpl* I which is also represented in the Hebrew Bible by the adjective *tāpēl* “tasteless, unseasoned” (Jb 6.6; La 2.14). *tpl* in Ezk 13.10,11,14,15; 22.28 is considered by dictionaries and commentaries as a variant of *tpl* “to smear, plaster” (cf. Driver-Gray n.d.: Part II, 10; *HAL*: 1634; BDB: 1074; Zorell: 907); Propp 1990 holds, on the other hand, that it should be connected with *tpl* I (there would then be a single root: see also *TWAT* VIII, 728). Considering that *tpl* is also

associated with false prophecy in Jr 23.13 and La 2.14, Propp concludes that “Ezekiel uses *tāpel* in the sense ‘vanity, folly’ and puns with *tpl* ‘to plaster’”(408). “If the root *tpl* was commonly applied to false prophecy in the sixth century, or if Ezekiel was familiar with Jeremiah 23, he might have realized that the assonance of *tpl* and *tpl* could be exploited in paranomastic metaphor” (407). The cultural association between plaster and mortar on the one hand and hypocrisy on the other, attested by various biblical passages (see Ps 119.69; Jb 13.4 and 14.17) would have favoured the emergence of this rhetorical figure in Ezekiel.

As for the form *tittappāl* in 2 Sam 22.27, it should be considered as an abbreviation or a textual corruption for *titpattal* from the verb *ptl* which is found in the parallel text of Ps 18.27 (*TWAT* VIII, 728).

In the Qumran texts there are five attestations of the root *tpl*: 1QH 6.36 (*ltpl*) is situated in a corrupt context, CD 8.12 and 19.25 refer to Ezk 13; the two occurrences in 5Q14.1, 3 relate to a verb *tpl* and the adjective (*tplw bkwl tpl*: a sort of linguistic play, *TWAT* VIII, 732).

A.2 In Mishnaic Hebrew there are attested the adjective *tāpēl* “insipid, unsalted” (referring to food: see b.Shabb 128a/b; b.Ḥul 113a) and the substantives *tplh* and *tplwt*: the latter is the only form present in the Mishna and seems to replace *tplh* in Mishnaic Hebrew (Bendavid 1967-71: II,442).

A.3 In the Targum the form תַּפְּלִי is attested (TgOnkelos on Dt. 1.1)(BDB:1074a).

A.4 The Hebrew root *tpl* is connected by many with the Arabic *tafala* “to spit” and *tuf* “saliva, spittle”.

A.5 Driver (Driver-Gray n.d.:11) holds that the various meanings found in Arabic would have developed out of the fundamental meaning of the Semitic root “to be savourless”, in the following sequence: 1) to (lose a good scent by the) neglect (of) perfume, 2) to be unperfumed, 3) to be ill-smelling, 4) to spit out (rejecting what is ill-savoured), 5) to spit (whence further meanings developed).

Other scholars (see Tur-Sinai 1967:20ff, Ben Yehuda XVI,7853, note 2) hold instead that the original meaning is the one attested by Arabic *tafala* “spit”. Propp justifies this hypothesis with the onomatopoeic assonance: “PS [Proto-Semitic] \**tpl* thus exemplified the widespread tendency of words with this meaning to contain a *p* and a *t*, presumably in imitation of the act itself. English “spit” and “ptooy” (the sound of expectoration) are obvious examples; we also have Greek *ptuo* and Latin *spuo/sputo*. Aramaic has *t<sup>e</sup>pap/t<sup>e</sup>pe*, and Ethiopic uses *tafa*. In Biblical Hebrew we find the *hapax legomenon topæ* “saliva”(Jb 17.6). In Mishnaic Hebrew the expression רוֹק תַּפְּל could maintain the memory of such an association.

## 2. Formal Characteristics

A.1 The substantive is formed according to the *pattern qitl*.

A.2 It can be considered as a *nomen unitatis* related to the collective *tāpel* (*TWAT* VIII, 730).

A.3 It is always attested in the f.s.

A.4 In Mishnaic Hebrew the alternation of the *pattern* with *tplwt* is recorded (Bendavid 1967-71:II,442).

### 3. Syntagmatics

A.1 There are no constructions with the particles.

A.2 *tplh* can refer to persons (Jr 23.13), situations (Jb 24.12) and, even though negatively, to God in Jb 1.22.

A.3 The substantive always appears as object, with the verbs *r'h* (Jr 23.13); *ntn* (Jb 1.22); *šwm* (Jb 24.12).

A.4 In Jb 1.22 the idiomatic phrase *ntn tplh l* is recorded (v. infra 6. Exegesis, B.1).

A.5 In Jr 23.13 *tplh* is in parallelism with *š'rwrh* “abomination” in v. 14: it is not, however, a matter of similar qualities, which are different in degree (McKane 1986:574). In Jb 1.22 *ntn tplh l* is in parallel with *h't'*. There are no other contextual relations.

### 4. Versions

#### a. LXX

ἀνόμημα “evil, transgression of the law”: Jr 23.13.

ἀφροσύνη “folly, thoughtlessness”: Jb 1.22.

Unclear: Jb 24.12.

A.1 ἀνόμημα also translates תועבה and בליעל, זמה, חטאת, נבלה, עון, פשע

A.2 ἀφροσύνη also translates תפל and אולת, כסיל, כסל, כסלה, נבלה, סכל, סכלות, פתי

A.3 In Jb 24.12 the expression ἐπισκοπήν ποιεῖν “pay attention, be watchful” is used. It is probably a case of an interpretative rendering of the context.

A.4 The LXX offers a different rendering for each occurrence. One could say that, beginning from an intuition of the real meaning of the lexeme offered in Jb 1.22 (note that ἀφροσύνη is also found in Symmachus and Theodotion), it prefers in the other two cases to have recourse to an interpretation of the meaning from the context (see also infra 6. Exegesis A.1).

B.1 Hatch-Redpath (1897-1906) mistakenly mention the translation of *tiplā* by δέησις in their concordance (see 285c): it is in fact a case of *tēpillā*. The error has been corrected in the second edition (Hatch-Redpath 1998).

#### b. Aquila

ἄναλος “without salt, unsalted”: Jr 23.13

A.1 The rendering of Aquila reflects the intention of the translation to keep close to the original language, adapting itself in this case to the primary meaning attested by the adjective (see McKane 1986:573; *TWAT* VIII,730): see infra 6. Exegesis A.1.

c. Symmachus

ἄφροσύνη “folly, thoughtlessness”: Jr 23.13.

ἄφρονεύομαι “to be silly, act foolishly”: Jb 1.22.

μωρία “folly”: Jb 24.12.

A.1 In Jb 1.22 the phrase *wl'-ntn tplh l'lhym* would seem to have been partly “censored”: in fact οὐδὲ ἠφρονεύσατο certainly presupposes *tplh* (see ἄφροσύνη in Jr 23.13), but the fact that Job could (even if negatively) have attributed this quality to God is passed over in silence (v. infra 6. Exegesis A.5). A similar tendency can also be observed in the Targum, the Peshitta and the Vulgate in the same verse.

A.2 For all the three occurrences Symmachus remains consistent in his rendering of the meaning of the lexeme.

d. Theodotion

ἄφροσύνη “folly, thoughtlessness”: Jb 24.12.

A.1 The translation of Theodotion for this occurrence is important, because it confirms the Hebrew *tiplâ* against the reading *tëpillâ* preferred by some commentators on the basis of the Peshitta.

e. Peshitta

*daggālūtā* “deceptiveness”: Jr 23.13.

No translation equivalent: Jb 1.22.

Different text: Jb 24.12.

A.1 In Jb 1.22 the expression *ntn tplh l* is translated by the verb *gaddep* “blaspheme”. It is an example of the same tradition of interpretation as in the Targum and the Vulgate.

A.2 In Jb 24.14 we have “their prayer”, which presupposes a *Vorlage* *tëpillâ*.

f. Targum

*TgPro*

רָשָׁע “wickedness, evil”: Jr 23.13.

A.1 The rendering of the Targum at Jr 23.13 corresponds to that of the LXX and is of a metaphorical kind: this meaning could already have developed in Hebrew from the denotation “lack of salt” (McKane 1986:573).

*TgJb*

מלי מטחא “rebellious words”: Jb 1.22.

A.1 Jb 1.22 seems to share the same censorious mentality which inspired the translation of Symmachus (v. supra): *wl'-ntn tplh l'lhym* becomes: "In all this Job did not sin, nor did he utter rebellious words before the Lord". In b.BB 12a Raba comments: "With his lips he did not sin, but he did sin with his heart" (Mangan 1991:27 note), grasping the nature of the defensive cover-up in the statement.

11QTgJb

No translation equivalent: Jb 24.12.

A.1 The text is partially different: "will God not bring its *punishment* (literally 'debt' הַחֹבָא)". It seems to be a case of a paraphrase of the text, which in essence considers *tplh* as really the non-punitive intervention of God.

g. Vulgate

*fatuitas* "foolishness, folly, silliness": Jr 23.13.

*quid stultum* "something foolish, silly": Jb 1.22.

No translation equivalent: Jb 24.12.

A.1 While *fatuitatem* in Jr 23.13 corresponds to the line of interpretation followed by Symmachus, Jb 1.22 (*in omnibus his non peccavit Iob neque stultum quid contra Deum locutus est*) is parallel to the Targum. As for Jb 24.12 (*et Deus inultum abire non patitur*), it seems to be a case of the same paraphrase as that encountered in 11QTgJb.

## 5. Lexical/Semantic Fields

A.1 *tplh* "senselessness, irrationality" forms part of the lexical field of the substantives of "knowledge" (Sciumbata 1996-97) and is situated at the negative pole of the field. On the paradigmatic level it is in polar opposition with all the lexemes of the positive pole, but its own direct polar antonym is *ṭ'm* "reason", which in the theoretical-speculative dimension (a semic feature shared with other lexemes, which understands knowledge as a theoretical matter) indicates a faculty considered from the standpoint of the effects which are produced by it: *ṭ'm* "reason" is the intellectual faculty which ensures a man's poise and good sense. In contrast *tplh* "senselessness, irrationality" indicates the lack of rationality and good sense in his actions. It is characterised by the features: "lack of the comprehensive faculty of thought"; "understood from its effects as the source of lack of poise and good sense".

At the negative pole *tplh* is opposed to *ptywt* "silliness, lack of knowledge" (which contains the seme "information", while *tplh* contains the seme "faculty") and to *ksylwt* "obtuseness" (which indicates instead the lack of *tbwnh*, namely the mental faculty which is open to knowledge). It has no polar antonymy with *pty*, "silliness, lack of education", insofar as this lexeme belongs to the jargon of the didactic strand in the wisdom movement; the same applies for *hwllwt* "insipience, ignorance", *ś/sklwt* "stupidity", *skl* "stupidity", *ksl* "obtuseness", which appear as neologisms coined by Qoheleth.

A.2 *tplh* does not appear in all the functional languages of biblical Hebrew: it is present in the poetic corpora of EBH<sub>1</sub> and LBH<sub>3</sub>, as well as in LBH<sub>1</sub> (Jb 1.22). The lexical field of the poetic language appears more articulated and richer, whether because of the greater thematic opportunity offered by the *corpus* to deploy from this lexicon or through the actual existence of words characterised as poetic (*d'h* “knowledge”, *lqh* “instruction”, *h'skl* “intelligence” and “judgement=sense, good sense”, *bynh* “discernment”, the last only in the pre-exilic language). It is then possible that *tplh* is a poetic term, whose appearance in the frame of the book of Job should be ascribed to an intentional intertextual echo of the statements in Jb 24.12 (v. infra 6. Exegesis A.5).

## 6. Exegesis

A.1 *tplh* derives from the adjective *tpl* “insipid”: it indicates therefore the lack of salt. This denotation can also be understood in a metaphorical sense to indicate the uselessness of a given action (see La 2.14, in parallelism with *šw'*). In line with a semantic development common to other languages (cf. e.g. Italian “insulso” or Tuscan “sciocco”), the lack of salt is projected onto the mental and cognitive plane, indicating the lack of rationality and sound sense (on the other hand, good sense is linked to salt: consider the Latin expression *cum grano salis* or the Italian “avere sale in zucca”; for a more general connection between taste and knowledge see the Latin *sapio*: Sciumbata 1996-97:278; Kedar-Kopfstein 1988:54). That *tplh* indicates essentially a lack of intellectual discrimination had already been grasped by the LXX (McKane 1986:573; *TWAT* VIII,730), which has ἀφροσύνη in Jb 1.22 (the same in Symmachus at Jr 23.13 and Theodotion at Jb 24.12; Symmachus also has ἀφρονεύομαι in Jb 1.22; cf. *fatuitatem* in the Vulgate at Jr 23.13). On the other hand the primary meaning “lack of salt” is reflected in Aquila at Jr 23.13 (ἄναλος), while elsewhere the translations interpret the substantive in a metaphorical sense on the moral or religious plane (hence LXX ἀνομήματα “impious deeds” and the Targum *rš* “wickedness” in Jr 23.13; note the ambiguity offered by Zorell 907 for this verse: “fatuitas, impietas”).

That it is a matter of a semantic development by means of synaesthesia (Kedar-Kopfstein 1988:54) can be confirmed by the parallel process in the antonym *t'm* “taste” > “reason”: the connection between the two lexemes had already been noticed by the medieval Jewish commentators Rashi and Ibn Ezra.

Among the dictionaries Schökel is the only one to grasp this interpretation of the meaning (804: “insipidez, tonteria, desatino”).

A.2 The lexeme *tplh* “senselessness, irrationality” is probably a poetic word. It belongs to the lexical field of knowledge. The antonym of *t'm* “reason”, it is characterised by the features: “negative pole”, “theoretical-speculative dimension”, “class: faculty”, “lack of the comprehensive faculty of thought”, “(understood) in its effects as the source of lack of poise and good sense” (Sciumbata 1996-97:349): it indicates in practice the mental deficiency of rationality and good sense, which is reflected in senseless actions (the substantive can also end up by designating these actions *tout court*).

A.3 In Jr 23.13 (*wbnby'y šmrwn r'yty tplh* “I have seen a senselessness among the prophets of Samaria”) prophesying in the name of Baal is stigmatised by *tplh*, as senseless behaviour (fruit of the lack of *t'm* “reason”), which will lead to destruction (McKane 1986:574). It seems that the designation of the building of a non-Jewish cult by *bet tiplâ* developed from this passage, in

opposition to *bet tēpillâ* to indicate the synagogue, which is found in the rabbinic literature (Even Shoshan 1993:IV,1470).

A.4 In Jb 24.12 (*m'yr mtym yn'qw wnpš-ḥllym tšw' w'lwh l'-yśym tplh* "The dying groan from the city; the soul of the wounded begs for help and God does not regard it as senselessness/does not pay attention to such senselessness") Job indirectly attributes senselessness to God, from the moment when he does not react to the senselessness of that which is happening: the outrageous actions of the wicked on the one hand and the sufferings of the one who has no rights and finds himself in their grip on the other (Sciumbata 1996-97:280 and 2000:29).

A.5 The occurrence of *tplh* in Jb 1.22 (*bkl-z't l'-ḥt' 'ywb wl'-ntn tplh l'lhym* "In all this Job did not sin and did not attribute senselessness to God") is the only one in the narrative register (language of prose). One has the impression that the frame means to refer expressly to Jb 24.12 (there is also a syntactic echo between the two phrases *w'lwh l'-yśym tplh* and *l'-ntn tplh l'lhym*), seeking to conceal the impiety of the accusation which Job there levels at God (the tendency is carried further forward by some translations: Symmachus, Targum, Peshitta, Vulgate). This term ends by summing up the problem around which the poem revolves: because it is precisely the lack of sound sense and the irrationality of God, with regard to the canons of retributive justice taught by the traditionalist currents of the wisdom movement, which troubles Job (Sciumbata 2000:30; Nicholson 1995). The internal cross-reference between Jb 1.22 and 24.12 is recognised by Habel (1985:360), for whom nevertheless the meaning of *tiplâ* is "wrong" (see infra B.3), and the second occurrence represents a "typical, ironic twist" of the poet with regard to that which is stated in Jb 1.22.

B.1 Other scholars do not consider the possibility of a semantic development of *tpl* on the mental and cognitive plane and allow only a metaphorical use on the moral level. Consider e.g. Propp (1990:405): "these abstractions (insipidity, vanity, blame) derive from a more concrete meaning of the root \**tpl* in Protosemitic"; or Driver (Driver-Gray n.d.:11), who on Jb 1.22 comments: "to ascribe תפלה to Yahweh should imply regarding him as having lost the moral savour or quality which had been characteristic of him (...) similarly in Jer., Yahweh sees in the prophets תפלה, or moral deterioration". In regard to the Greek ἀφοσύνη in Jr 23.13 and La 2.14 it is for him a case of "a tolerable attempt to reproduce the transferred moral sense of the word".

Many of the translations offered by the commentaries and the dictionaries lie on this line of interpretation (cf. Clines 1989:2 "speak irreverently"; BDB 1074 "unsavouriness, unseemliness" of a moral kind; HAL: 1635 "Fades, Anstössiges").

B.2 In Jb 1.22 *tplh* is interpreted as "indignity, insult" (Dahood) or "spittle, reproach" (Tur-Sinai), on the basis of the connection with the Arabic *tafala* "to spit" and *tifl* "spittle" (Michel 1987: ad loc.; cf. Pope <sup>3</sup>1973:17; TWAT VIII,730). The expression *ntn tplh l* is hence considered as the opposite of *ntn kbwd l* (so expressly Pope <sup>3</sup>1973:17). The existence of various idiomatic expressions constructed on the model *ntn* + substantive + *l* + *Yhwh/l'hym* (see also *ntn kbwd l*, *ntn twdh l*, *ntn 'z l*) does not, however, justify the presumed strict interrelation between *ntn tplh l* and *ntn kbwd l*: as Driver notes (Driver-Gray n.d: Part II, 10), the meaning of these phrases is "to give, i.e. ascribe, glory (praise, strength) to Yahweh, i.e. to acknowledge that Yahweh is glorious, praiseworthy or strong" (in 1 Sm 18.8 a similar expression refers to Saul). The phrase in question asserts that Job does not discredit

God by asserting that he has displayed this quality” (ibid.), which makes him incline towards an interpretation of *tplh* as a negative quality or faculty, rather than as “insult” or something similar.

**B.3** The interpretations of *tplh* as “something unworthy” or “wrong” in Jb 24.12 (Gordis 1978: ad loc.; Habel 1985: ad loc.) appear to be attempts at interpretation from the context, which do not take account of the meaning of *tplh* in its other two attestations, nor of the data from the ancient translations nor of those of the semantic development (see also Zorell “iniusta crudelitatis” for Jb 1.22 and 24.12).

## 7. Conclusions

**A.1** According to the paradigmatic-componential analysis carried out by Sciumbata 1996-97 the lexeme *tplh* “senselessness, irrationality”, a semantic development from the adjective *tpl* “insipid, lacking salt”, is probably a poetic word (it appears in the *standard* poetic language, in the poetic language of Job and in the prose frame of the book, where it seems to be an intertextual echo of Jb 24.12). It belongs to the negative pole of the lexical field of the substantives for “knowledge”. As the polar antonym of *ṭm* “reason” it indicates the lack of rationality and sound sense which issues in actions and behaviour that can also be described in such a way.

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## Appendix: Functional Languages of Ancient Hebrew (1998)

(as revised by M.P. Sciumbata in 2001)

ABH Archaic Biblical Hebrew	Gn 49:3-27; Exod 15:1-19; Nm 22:2-24:25; Dt 32; 33; Jd 5; 1 Sam 2:1-10; Ps 68
EBH <sub>1</sub> Historical-Narrative Language	Torah (except ABH and EBH <sub>4</sub> ); Former Prophets; Ruth; Inscriptions (first half of the first millennium)
EBH <sub>2</sub> Poetical Language	2Kgs 19:21-35; 2Sam 22:1-23:7; Classical Prophecy; Lam; Prv; Ps (except post-exilic ones); [Jer, Ezek and Lam are chronologically exilic, whereas Hag, Zech, Mal, Joel, Isa 40-66 and probably Prv 1-9, 30-31 are chronologically post-exilic; however these sections are considered typologically pre-exilic]
EBH <sub>3</sub> Language of Hosea	Hosea
EBH <sub>4</sub> Juridical-Cultic Language	Exod 20:1-17; 20:22-23:33; 34:10-26; Lv; Dt 5:6-21; 12-26; 27:14-26 (Ezek, whose language is at the same time poetic and of juridical-cultic type, can be considered in this section)
LBH <sub>1</sub> Historical-Narrative Language	Jonah; Job 1-2; 42:7-17; Qoh; Est; Dn; Ezra; Neh; 1-2 Chr; inscriptions of the second half of the first millennium
LBH <sub>2</sub> Poetical Language	Cant; Ps 103; 117; 119; 124; 125; 133; 144; 145; Doxologies 41:14; 72:19-20; 106:47-48; disputed: 104, 106, 107, 109, 111, 112, 113, 116, 126, 135, 137, 143, 146, 147, 148
LBH <sub>3</sub> Language of Job	Poetry of Job
BSH Late Hebrew of Ben Sira	Ben Sira
QH <sub>1</sub> Language of the exegetical and para-biblical literature at Qumran	<i>Pešarim</i> , Paraphrases, Apocrypha
QH <sub>2</sub> Qumranic Poetical Language	Apocryphal Psalms; <i>Hodayot</i> ; 1QS X:1-XI:22; 1QM X:8-XII:18; XIII:2b-18; XIV:4b-18; XV:7b-XVI:1; XVI:15-XVII:9; XVIII:6b-XIX:8; Hymns & Sapiential Works; Blessings; Curses; Liturgical Works
QH <sub>3</sub> Qumranic Juridical-Cultic Language	Rules; Liturgical-Ritual Works; Halakhic Texts; War Scroll; Temple Scroll; Damascus Doc; Rules of the Community etc.