

Strength

Strength is the inner resolve or the physical ability to accomplish an endeavor, influence an outcome, or prevail in a conflict. God is the main source of strength, with people being strong either for or against the Lord, his people, or his ways. Other spiritual forces, animals, and objects are also attributed with strength.

Concept Summary

Strength occurs in a broad range of contexts and subjects, being used both positively and negatively. In the OT, there are many different kinds and sources of strength, as well as several Hebrew terms to describe the concept of strength. The Hebrew verbs **אַמַּץ** (*'āmaṣ*, “be resolute”) and **חָזַק** (*hāzaq*, “be courageous”) often express the kind of strength that God wants his people to have in the midst of challenging times. The OT often uses these terms to describe the strength that God’s people need to undertake and successfully accomplish his commands (e.g., Deut 31:6; Josh 1:6; Psa 27:14). The verb **חָזַק** (*hāzaq*) also appears in the recurring divine command to “be strong and courageous” (e.g., Josh 1:6, 9). This command expresses the inner tenacity to stick with a task that is achieved by obeying God and trusting his promise to supply the necessary abilities and resources.

The NT uses several Greek terms derived from various roots to describe and contrast the power of God with human strength and the forces of evil. For example, the adjective **ἰσχυρός** (*ischyros*, “strong”) is used to compare the strength of two parties (e.g., Mark 3:11; 1 Cor 10:22) and the strength of God’s plan to bring salvation to humanity over human conceptions of wisdom and strength (e.g., 1 Cor 1:25, 27). By contrast, the nouns **ἐξουσία** (*exousia*, “authority”) and **δύναμις** (*dynamis*, “power”) typically refer to strength in terms of authority rather than physical power. The NT often uses these terms to explain the basis for the power of Jesus’ teachings; his complete authority over all forces of darkness, sickness, and death derives from the fact that he was speaking and acting under the full authority of God (e.g., Matt 10:1; Mark 2:10; Luke 20:8; Acts 1:7–8).

Theological Overview

God’s strength is often contrasted with natural or worldly strength. In the OT, the Lord is the mighty one, a strong tower, who gives strength and power to people. Types of human strength include: courage; valor; wisdom; wealth; inner resolve (Psa 31:24; Prov 24:5; Zech 8:9, 13) either for or against someone or something (Ruth 1:18; Exod 7:13); physical or intellectual power to act (Dan 1:4), grab hold, or seize; military might (Psa 18:40); and the social or political influence gained by these (Deut 8:17). Animals identified as strong are the lion, behemoth, and ox. Inanimate objects are also described as strong, such as the wind, water, sound of thunder, a voice or cry, and a city

or fortress. In the NT, strength is primarily used to display Jesus Christ's rule, authority, and power over all creation. His strength is demonstrated through teaching with authoritative power, performing miracles, healing all who come to him, casting out demons, commanding the forces of nature, and raising people from the dead. The working of God's mighty strength through Christ is given through the Holy Spirit.

Lexical Information

Old Testament

אָמַץ (*'āmaš*). vb. **to be strong, courageous, strengthened, powerful, resolute.** *Used in several Hebrew stems to convey a state of being strong or the act of strengthening.*

The Qal stem of the verb *'āmaš* describes a state of inner or physical strength. The range of meaning includes being strong, courageous, powerful, or firm in conviction, with corresponding action. It appears frequently in a commissioning formula with the verb **חָזַק** (*hāzaq*) in order to accomplish what God has spoken: “Be strong and courageous” (e.g., Deut 31:6; Josh 1:6). This word is often used in situations in which God leads his people in military conquest to obtain the inheritance of the promised land. It is also used in David's songs to refer to the military strength of his enemies from whom the Lord delivered him (2 Sam 22:18; compare Pss 18:17; 142:6).

The Piel stem occurs 19 times with the meaning to strengthen or to make firm for or against someone or something. This form refers to the strengthening of a person (Deut 3:28), a group of men (Amos 2:14), the kingdom of Judah (2 Chr 11:17), and repairing the temple structure (2 Chr 24:13). Many anthropomorphic metaphors are used to describe this giving of strength for virtue or valor: to the feeble knees (Job 4:4); to the weak hands (Isa 36:3); to the arms (Prov 31:17); and to the heart (Deut 2:20). The Hiphil stem occurs only twice, both with **חָזַק** (*hāzaq*, “prove to be strong”) in the formula normally found in the Qal stem: “Be strong and courageous” (Psa 27:14; 31:24). The Hitpael stem occurs four times, used to express resolve, determination, or strengthening oneself toward a course of action (Ruth 1:18; 2 Chr 13:7).

The root occurs six times as the adjective **אָמִץ** (*'amîš*, “strong”) referring to God himself as strong and mighty (Isa 28:2; 40:26), to powerful warriors (Amos 2:16), and to a strong conspiracy against David (2 Sam 15:12). It also is used once each as the nouns **אָמֶץ** (*'ōmeš*, “strength”; Job 17:9) and **אָמֶשׂא** (*'amšâ*, “strength”; Zech 12:5).

חָזַק (*hāzaq*). vb. **to be strong, to strengthen, to be courageous; to fortify.** *The verb has a wide range of meanings depending on the context. It is used in several Hebrew stems to convey a state of being strong or the act of strengthening.*

In the Qal stem, the verb **חָזַק** (*hāzaq*) primarily means to imbue with inner or physical strength for a purpose or intended action (Josh 23:6; Judg 7:11). It is used positively in the OT with reference to the possession of the inner resolve required to carry out God's commands (Deut 11:8; 1 Chr 28:7; Dan 10:19); it is used negatively to refer to becoming resolute against God or his people. The word occurs together with the verb **אָמַץ** (*'āmaš*, “be strong”) 15 times in the commissioning formula, “Be strong and courageous.” The term frequently refers to the military might of Israel-Judah (Judg 1:28; 2 Chr 8:3) or of their enemies (2 Sam 10:11; 1 Kgs 20:23). Sometimes it

describes prevailing over one's enemies (1 Sam 17:50) or overpowering and exploiting a person (2 Sam 13:14). In the Piel stem, which occurs 61 times, the primary denotation is to fortify or make strong. It is used to encourage someone (Deut 1:38; 1 Sam 23:16); to strengthen a person for a task (Judg 16:28; Dan 10:18); and to indicate repairing damage to the temple (2 Kgs 12:6; 2 Chr 24:5). The Hiphil stem occurs most frequently, 118 times, with the principle meaning of a strong grasp. The form is used in the sense of “grab hold,” “seize,” “press upon,” or “repair.” It is used extensively in Neh 3:4–4:16 to describe the repairing and rebuilding of the Second Temple. The Hithpael stem occurs 27 times, used to convey encouraging oneself toward a purpose or action (Gen 48:2; 1 Sam 4:9; 30:6); being brave (Num 13:20; 2 Chr 15:8) or resolute (2 Sam 10:12; 1 Chr 19:13); and strengthening one's political or military positioning (2 Sam 3:6; 1 Chr 11:10). This root also appears as the adjectives חָזָק (*ḥāzāq*, “firm, hard”) and חָזֵק (*ḥāzeq*, “strong, loud”), which both describe strength, power, or might.

אָזַז (*ʿāzaz*). vb. **to prevail, overpower, be mighty; to establish; to be bold or brazen.** *The key idea of this verb relates to being strong or strengthened; it is often used in the OT to express military victory.*

In the Qal stem, this verb refers to might associated with military strength (Judg 3:10; Dan 11:12), wealth (Psa 52:7), human government (Psa 9:19), wisdom (Eccl 7:19), or God (Psa 89:13). The verb also appears in the Hiphil stem as part of idiomatic language of “hardening his/her face,” meaning to become brazen or bold (Prov 7:13; 21:29). The Niphal form in Isa 33:19, from the root אָזַז (*yāʿaz*, “be arrogant”), refers to a defiant or fierce people.

The noun and the adjective of this root appear in a wide spectrum of contexts and subjects. For example, the noun חָזָק (*ḥāz*, “strong”) can refer to God as strong (Mic 5:3; Isa 51:9); as giving strength to people (Psa 68:35); and as a stronghold, a strong tower, or a strong refuge (Judg 9:51; Psa 61:3; Jer 51:53); Israelites are encouraged to seek both the Lord and his strength (Exod 15:13; Psa 105:4). A woman of valor prepares herself for a task with inner and physical fortitude, and her adornment is strength and dignity (Prov 31:17, 25). Political, social, and military power are sought after by many (Prov 10:15; Jer 48:17; Isa 26:1). In the OT, the adjective חָזָק (*ʿaz*, “mighty”) is used to characterize humans as strong or powerful, and it can be applied to the Canaanites (Num 13:28) or to opponents of God more generally (2 Sam 22:18; Amos 5:9). Nonhumans and things described as strong or powerful include: the wind (Exod 14:21); the lion (Judg 14:14); and love (Song 8:6).

גָּבַר (*gābar*). vb. **to rise up above or against; to prevail, overcome, overwhelm.** *This verb means to rise up. In relation to the concept of strength, the key idea of this verb is to be strong or great; the OT often uses the term in the context of warfare.*

The verb's literal meaning is used to describe the floodwaters in Gen 7:18–24. Related to this use, *gābar* can also have the sense of prevailing over, overcoming, or overwhelming. For example, Judah “became strong” in preeminence over his brothers (1 Chr 5:2). The verb can express victory in a military context. When Moses held up his hands, Israel prevailed in battle against the Amalekites (Exod 17:11). At other times, enemies prevailed in battle (2 Sam 11:2; Lam 1:16). In a similar but figurative sense, iniquities and lies can prevail against a person (Psa 65:3; Jer 9:2). The Piel stem occurs only three times, with a nuance of God strengthening and restoring his people to walk in his ways (Zech 10:6, 12). In the Hiphil stem, this verb can describe how arrogant people use persuasive words to “prevail” with their tongue (e.g., Psa 12:4).

The adjective גִּבּוֹר (*gibbôr*, “mighty”) carries the meaning of “strong,” “mighty,” “champion,” or “hero” and is mainly used in contexts of battle or conquest. Other than being used once to metaphorically describe a lion as a king (Prov 30:30), it is used in reference to God or people. Goliath, David’s three men, and others are described as mighty warriors, champions, or heroes (1 Sam 17:51; 2 Sam 23:9; Ezek 39:20). The noun גֵּבֵר (*geber*, “male”) often denotes a man in general (Psa 52:7; 1 Chr 23:3), but it also is used to refer to a baby boy (Job 3:3) and a dead man (Job 14:10).

גִּבּוֹרִי (*’ābîr*). n. **mighty, strong, powerful.** *The basic meaning is mighty, brave, and strong.*

This rarely used term often functions as part of the names for God, describing him as either “the Mighty One of Jacob” (Gen 49:24; Isa 49:26; Psa 132:2) or “the Mighty One of Israel” (Isa 1:24). The adjective גִּבּוֹר (*’abbîr*, “strong”) means valiant, powerful, or mighty. It is used to refer to warriors (Psa 76:5; Isa 10:13; Jer 46:15) or horses in battle (Judg 5:22; Jer 8:16).

הַיִּל (*hayil*). n. masc. **might, status, wealth, or strength of character.** *The main idea of this verb is “to be strong” or “to be firm.” The term carries the implication of influence due to the display of valor or strength.*

The meaning of strength in this word alludes to the influence or impact produced by strength of character, excellence, or might demonstrated by the subject in society, war, or faith. Capable men were given positions of leadership (Gen 47:6; Exod 18:21, 25). A woman of valor or excellence is given respect; she is a crown on the head of her husband, valued above jewels (Ruth 3:11; Prov 12:4; 31:10, 29). The display of wealth of the Queen of Sheba won her an audience with King Solomon (1 Kgs 10:2; 2 Chr 9:1). Triumph and rejoicing result from the Lord’s strong hand of deliverance (Pss 108:13; 118:15–16). It is the Lord who gives his people the ability to produce wealth, property, or victory (Deut 8:17–18; Psa 33:17). The term is often used synonymously with “army” (Deut 11:4; Ezek 38:15).

קֹחַ (*kōah*). n. masc. **strength, power, divine strength.** *This verb mainly describes physical strength and prowess or a display of power.*

This noun usually refers to the physical prowess or strength of a man or the power of God. Although it is used a few times to refer to strength displayed by property, possessions, or intellect (Prov 5:10; Ezra 2:69; Dan 1:4), it primarily denotes a display of physical or divine power. The noun can denote the strength of various people and animals, including Sampson (Judg 16:5–30), the behemoth (Job 4:15), and the ox (Prov 14:4). According to Proverbs, the splendor of young men is their physical prowess (Prov 20:29), while those who faint in the face of adversity lack strength (Prov 24:10). God displays his power by delivering Israel from Egypt (Exod 9:16; 15:6). He also gives strength to the weary, and those who wait expectantly upon the Lord renew their strength (Isa 40:29–31). The prophet Zechariah says that God’s purposes will be accomplished not by the might of human valor (הַיִּל *hayil*), nor by the exertion of physical prowess (קֹחַ *kōah*), but by the Spirit of the Lord (Zech 4:6).

New Testament

ἰσχυρός (*ischyros*). adj. **strong, mighty, powerful.** *Used to describe different kinds of strength in a wide range of subjects; often used comparatively with “stronger” or contrasted with “weak.”*

This adjective, along with its superlative form ἰσχυρότερος (*ischyroteros*, “stronger, mightier”), is often used comparatively in the NT. For example, as a strong man is plundered by a stronger one, so Jesus overpowered demonic forces (Matt 12:28–29; Mark 3:26–27; Luke 11:20–22). In another example, the weakness of God is said to be stronger than man (1 Cor 1:25). According to Paul, God chooses what the world considers weak in order to shame the strong (*ta ischyra*; 1 Cor 1:27). This term is used to describe the strength of other things in the NT, including a mighty angel (Rev 5:2); young men who are strong because God’s word resides within them (1 John 2:13); men who are mighty in battle (Heb 11:34; Rev 19:18); a powerful voice (Rev 18:2); loud thunder (Rev 19:6); and Babylon, the mighty city (Rev 18:10). The related noun ἰσχύς (*ischys*, “strength, might”) refers to the ability to act with strength. The noun *ischys* appears in Jesus’ quotation of Deut 6:5 (“you shall love the Lord your God ... from your whole strength”; Mark 12:30; compare Luke 10:27), as well as in Peter’s exhortation to believers to serve the Lord with the strength that God supplies (1 Pet 4:11; compare Eph 6:10).

ἰσχύω (*ischyō*). vb. **to be strong, effective; to be able to do something.** *The basic sense of this verb has to do with ability and capacity to do something.*

The verb is used in the NT to identify physical, cognitive, and spiritual abilities. For instance, Jesus states that people who are “healthy” (*hoi ischyontes*) do not need physicians (Matt 9:12; Mark 2:17). The term is used in a negative sense to describe certain religious men being unable to successfully argue against the wise and spiritual words of the disciple Stephen (Acts 6:10). James uses this verb to state that “the effective prayer of a righteous person accomplishes much” (Jas 5:16). Paul sums up his discourse about learning the secret of contentment in all worldly circumstances by affirming that his ability comes through the Lord who strengthens him (Phil 4:13).

δύναμις (*dynamis*). n. fem. **power, demonstration of power; display of divine, supernatural ability.** *The core idea of this term is the ability to do something.*

This noun frequently occurs with ἐξουσία (*exousia*, “authority”) to express the demonstration of Christ’s power to perform miracles, heal, cast out demons, and raise people from the dead. Specifically, *dynamis* is used to denote Christ’s “miracles” (e.g., Matt 11:20–23; Mark 6:2–14; Luke 10:13), power to heal (e.g., Mark 6:30; Acts 10:38), divine displays of power over human and spiritual powers (e.g., Luke 4:36; 10:19; Acts 2:22), the apostles’ power (Acts 3:12; 4:7; 2 Cor 12:12), and miraculous powers performed in the name of Jesus (Rom 8:38; 15:19; 1 Cor 2:4). Believers in Jesus Christ are inwardly strengthened with power by the Holy Spirit to do his works and carry out his will (Luke 24:49; Acts 4:7; 1 Cor 4:20). *Dynamis* is also used to indicate the power of human abilities (Matt 25:15; Rev 18:3) as well as to denote demonic powers (Acts 8:10, 13; Rev 13:2; 17:13). According to Revelation, God and the Lamb alone are worthy to receive power (Rev 4:11; 5:12; 19:1). The related verb δυναμόω (*dynamoō*, “to be made strong, enable”) means to be endowed with ability or strength, and δύναμαι (*dynamai*, “to be powerful, able”) occurs roughly 200 times and indicates God or people being able or capable to do or perform (Matt 26:61; John 15:4; Eph 3:20).

ἐνδυναμόω (*endynamoō*). vb. **to receive strength; be strengthened for service or action.** *The core meaning of this verb is to make something or someone strong.*

In the NT, it is used to indicate believers being strong in God’s strength (Eph 6:10; 2 Tim 4:17); strong in God’s grace (2 Tim 2:1); strengthened for service to the Lord (1 Tim 1:12); and strengthened in faith through resolve to believe God’s promises (Rom 4:20).

ἐξουσία (*exousia*). n. fem. **authority, right to act.** *This term denotes the power and ability to speak and act due to legitimate right.*

The noun is used frequently throughout the Gospels with reference to the authority of Jesus, which differs from that of the scribes (Matt 7:29; Mark 1:22; Luke 4:32). Jesus has the authority to forgive sin and heal all afflictions (Mark 2:10–11; Luke 5:24); he is able to cast out demons (Mark 1:27; Luke 4:36; 9:1) and judge people (John 5:27) because of this authority; and he has authority over all people (John 17:2), all evil powers and figures (Luke 10:19; Col 1:13; Rev 12:10), and even over death (John 10:18; 1 Cor 15:25–26). The centurion believed the power of Jesus' spoken word to heal his servant because he himself understood the power of rightful authority (Matt 8:9). The related verb ἐξουσιάζω (*exousiazō*, “to have legitimate right”) occurs three times in the NT (Luke 22:25; 1 Cor 7:4; 6:12).

κράτος (*kratos*). n. neut. **power, dominion.** *This term refers specifically to manifest strength or power and often refers to God's strength.*

Many of the NT uses occur along with noun δόξα (*doxa*, “glory”) in the liturgical formula, “to him be the glory and power forever” (e.g., 1 Pet 4:11; Jude 1:25; Rev 1:6). Elsewhere in the NT, the term denotes God's mighty power (Eph 1:9; 6:10) and his eternal power (1 Tim 6:16; Rev 5:13). The related verb κρατέω (*krateō*, “grasp”) means “to hold onto” or “to seize.” For example, the Gospels use the verb to describe the action of Jesus taking someone by the hand to raise them up in healing (Matt 9:25; Mark 1:31; Luke 8:54). The other main use occurs when Jesus is seized and taken into custody before the crucifixion (Matt 26:48–57; Mark 14:1, 44–51).

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