עֵזֶר

(For fuller discussion of the lexical field as a whole see the 'Overview of SAHD entries for "Deliverance" words' on this site)

**Introduction**

Grammatical Type: n m.

Occurrences: Total 21x OT (23x including the place name הָאֶבֶן הָעֵזֶר in 1Sm 4.1; 7.12), 0x Sir, 19x Qum

Sir: 36.29 (MS B), but should be emended (see Text Doubtful A.1).

Qum: 1QHᵃ 6.29 (frg); 1QM (1Q33) 1.2; 1QM 4.13; 12.7; 13.8; 13.10; 17.6; 1QS 3.24; 4Q303.10 (frg); 4Q382 17.2; 4Q416 2.iii.21; 4Q417 2.i.7; 4Q418 10a-b.4; 4Q418a 16b+17.3 (frg); 4Q491 11ii14 (frg); 4Q495 2.2 (= 1QM 13.10); 4Q511 125 i.3 (frg); 5Q25 2 i.1 (frg); 11Q13 2.14.

Text doubtful:

**A.1** The reading of MS B at Sir 36.29b of עזר should certainly be emended to עיר, as preserved in all the other extant manuscripts (MSS C, D) and in Bmg. The letters *yodh* and *zayin* in the scribal hand of B can only be distinguished by the length of the tails.

**A.2** In several of the Qumran texts listed above it is uncertain whether the form is a verb or noun (see also entry on עָזַר): 1QM 13.8; 13.10; 1QS 3.24; 4Q382 17.2; 4Q495 2.2.

**B.1** 4Q382 17.2 contains the reading עזר [ . The context is indeterminate and therefore the reading cannot be assigned to a lexeme.

**B.2** In the Qumran ms 1QIsᵃ at Is 30.5 the noun עזרה is found where the MT has עֵזֶר, indicating the inter-changeability of these two nouns (Lipiński 2001:14). It is not possible to determine which is the 'original' reading, although one may note that in the Qumran texts there is a greater tendency to form feminine nouns from masculine nouns (Qimron §330.4).

Qere/Ketiv: Ezk 12.14 Kt עזרה Qr עֶזְרוֹ or emend to עֹזְרָיו 'his helpers' (cf. BHS), following LXX, Syr. And Tg.

**1. Root and Comparative Material**

**A.1** [See עָזַר]

**B.1** [nil].

**2. Formal Characteristics**

**A.1** – *qitl* form, in which seghol appears after a guttural (JM: §88Ch; 97Aa)

**B.1** [nil]

**3. Syntagmatics**

**A.1** עֵזֶר is the subject of the verb היה 'to be' (Dt 33.7); בּוֹא 'to come' (Ps 121.1).

**A.2** עֵזֶר is the object of verb עָשָׂה 'to make' (Gn 2.18; 4Q303.10), מָצָא 'to find' (Gn 2.20), Piel זרה 'to scatter' (Ezk 12.14), שָׁלַח 'to send' (Ps 20.3; 1QM 17.6), הלך 'to walk' + prep עִם 'with' (4Q416 2.iii.21; 4Q418 10a-b.4 reconstr.), Piel שׁוה 'to set' (Ps 89.20), and Niphal עזר (Dn 11.34); כתב 'to write' (1QM 4.13); חשׁב 'to reckon as' (4Q417 2.i.7).

**A.3** עֵזֶר is the predicate of אלהים 'God' (Ex 18.4), of יהוה 'Lord' (Dt 33.7), of אֶל יַעֲקֹב 'the God of Jacob' (Ps 146.5), and of כול אלי [הצדק] all the gods [of justice]'. It is also in apposition to יהוה 'Lord' (Ps 33.20; 70.6; 115.9, 10, 11); to כֹּל אֲשֶׁר סְבִיבֹתָיו 'all who surround him' (Ezk 12.14); and to מרשיעי ברית 'the violators of the covenant'(1QM 1.2).

**A.4** עֵזֶר is nomen regens with אל 'God' i.e. 'God's help' (1QM 4.13), with בשרכה 'the hel[p of your flesh]' (4Q416 2.iii.21; 4Q418 10a-b.4), and possibly with שארית 'the remnant' (1QM 13.8), preceded by the preposition לְ (or this could be an infinitive construct).

**A.5** עֵזֶר is nomen rectum of מָגֵן 'shield' (Dt 33.29), אֶבֶן 'stone' (1Sm 7.12).

**A.6** עֵזֶר is also followed by בְּ 'in' + שֵׁם יהוה 'name of the Lord' (Ps 124.8), and followed by instrumental beth + גבורות מלאך האדיר 'by (means of) the power of the majestic angel' (1QM 17.6).

**A.7** עֵזֶר is followed by the preposition כְּ + נֶגֶד 'opposite' (Gn 2.18, 20; 4Q303.10).

**A.8** עֵזֶר is followed by the preposition לְ 'for' + גורל [ב]ריתו 'the lot of his covenant' (1QM 17.6).

**A.9** עֵזֶר is followed by the preposition מִן 'from' + noun צַר 'enemy' (Dt 33.7), indicating the danger from which help is sought. מִן may also denote the source of the help: מִן + noun קֹדֶשׁ 'sanctuary' (Ps 20.3), and מִן + עִם + יהוה 'Lord' (Ps 121.2).

**A.10** עֵזֶר is followed by the preposition עַל 'upon' + noun גִּבּוֹר 'mighty one' (Ps 89.20)

**A.11** עֵזֶר is preceded by בְּ (*beth essentiae*) (Ex 18.4; Dt 33.26; Ps 146.5; 1QM 1.2; 11Q13 2.14) and instrumental beth, following the verb בנה (1QHᵃ 6.29), although this text is fragmentary and the object of the verb is missing. It is preceded elsewhere by the preposition ב (5Q25 2 i 1), although this text is also fragmentary and there is insufficient context to establish the meaning. At Ho 13.9 MT is barely intelligible without rearrangement or the addition of a word, for which there is no justification: with the text as it stands Andersen and Freedman (1980, 625), followed by ESV, rendered בי בעזרך 'against me, against your helper', which is possible in isolation but (like Macintosh's suggestion [1997, 536]) makes a poor fit with the context. LXX and Sy support the emendation of בי to מי (BHS), which assumes a widely attested type of scribal error and clarifies the sense in a way that fits the interrogative style of v. 10. The *beth* of בעזרך can then be understood as *beth essentiae*, which is found several times before both עזר and עזרה (see Syntagmatics), here referring to potential (divine?) helpers who have failed to save Israel from destruction by Yahweh (שׁחתך may be understood either as an indefinite 3rd sing. perf. verb equivalent to a passive, with the vocalisation of MT, or with Pesh. as a 1st sing. perf. verb (written defectively) with Yahweh as subject as in vv. 8 and 11).

**A.12** עֵזֶר is preceded by the preposition לְ 'as a … helper', qualifying עדת קדושיכה בתוכנו 'the congregation of your holy ones will be amongst us' (1QM 12.7).

**A.13** עֵזֶר is preceded by the preposition עם 'with' (4Q418a 16b+17.3), although the context is unclear as the text is fragmentary.

**A.14** עֵזֶר is joined by *waw* to נצל Hiphil (Ex 18.4), to מָגֵן 'shield' (Ps 33.20; 115.9, 10, 11), and to כָּל־אֲגַפָּיו 'all his troops' (Ezk 12.14).

**A.15** עֵזֶר is qualified by the adjective מְעָט 'little' (Dn 11.34), and by עולמים 'eternal' (1QM 12.7; 17.6).

**B.1** [nil]

## 4. Versions

*a.* LXX:

βοηθός (Gn 2.18, 20; Ex 18.4; Dt 33.7, 26, 29; 1Sm 7.12; Ezk 12.14 [pl for s]; Ps 33[32].20; 70[69].6; 115[113].9[17], 10[18], 11[19]; 146[145].5);
βοήθεια (Is 30.5; Ps 20[19].3; 89[88].20; 121[120].1, 2; 124[123].8; Dn 11.34 [Theodotion]);
βοηθέω (Ho 13.9);
ἰσχύς (Dn 11.34 [LXX]);
Αβενεζερ (1Sm 7.12)

Minor Greek Versions **[MRN]**:
    ἀντίληψις (Symm: Ps 89[88].20)
    βοήθεια (Al: Ps 121[120].1)

*b.* Peshitta:
    *m'drn'* (Gn 2.18, 20; Ezk 12.14; Ps 33.20; 70.6; 121.1);
    *'wdrn'* (1Sm 7.12; Is 30.5; Ps 20.3; 89.20; 121.2; 124.8; Dn 11.34);
    *'dr* (Ex 18.4; Dt 33.26, 29; Ho 13.9; Ps 146.5);
    *'dwr'* (Dt 33.7; Ps 115.9, 10, 11).

*c.* Targum:

**TgO**

סְמַךְ (Gn 2.18, 20);
Pael סעד (Dt 33.7);
סַעֲדָא (Ex 18.4; Dt 33.26, 29).

**TgJon**

Pael סעד (Is 30.5);
סַעֲדָא (1Sm 7.12; Ezk 12.14; Ho 13.9).

**TgNeo**
זוג (Gn 2.18, 20);
סעד וסמך (Dt 33.7);
סעדא (Ex 18.4; Dt 33.29).
zero (Dt 33.26).

**TgFr**
בר זוג (Gn 2.18, 20);
סעד וסמך (Dt 33.7);
סעדא (Dt 33.29);
zero (Dt 33.26).

**TgCG**
זוג (Gn 2.18, 20 Ms B);
סעד וסמך (Dt 33.7 Ms DD).

**TgPsJon**
סמך (Gn 2.18, 20);
סעד וסמך (Dt 33.7);
סעדא (Ex 18.4; Dt 33.26, 29).

**TgPsa**

Pael סעד (Ps 89.20; 115.9, 10, 11);
סַעֲדָא (Ps 20.3; 33.20; 70.6; 121.1, 2; 124.8; 146.5).

*d.* Vulgate:
    *adiutorium* (Gn 2.18; 1Sm 7.12; Ps 89[88].20);
    *adiutor* (Gn 2.20; Ex 18.4; Dt 33.7; 1Sm 7.12);
    *auxiliator* (Dt 33.26; Ps 115[113].9[17], 10[18], 11[19]; 146[145].5);

*auxilium* (Dt 33.29; Is 30.5; Ho 13.9; Ps 20[19].3; 33[32].20; 70[69].6; 121[120].1, 2; 124[123].8; Dn 11.34);

[[*praesidium* (Ezk 12.14)]].

**A.1** As noted in the entry for עֵזֶר, the LXX has a strong preference for βοηθέω and cognate nouns.

**A.2** At 1Sm 7.12 the mss present a double translation, first the transliteration of the name and then its meaning.

**A.3** The primary verb used to translate עֵזֶר in the Peshitta is *ʿdr*, and it follows suit with the related nouns.

**A.4** In the Targumim, the translation of עֵזֶר is usually סיע or סעד, which both carry a general sense of help in terms of aid, assistance and support. In the translation of the nominal form here, the only addition is סָמַךְ 'support', in the sense of something / someone to lean on or rely on.

**A.5** As noted in the entry for עֵזֶר, the Vg has a strong preference for *adiuvo* and *auxilior* and their cognate nouns. In Ezk 12.14 *praesidium* 'defence, guard' is exceptionally used for 'his help(ers)' because they are those who surround 'the prince in Jerusalem' (v. 10), i.e. the king, to defend him (כל אשר סביבתיו): compare the places where *praesidium* is used with a verb to represent עֵזֶר. Like *ḥyl*ʾ in Ps 108.13 (see עֶזְרָה, Versions A.4), *praesidium* specifies the particular form that the help provided takes and does not represent the core meaning of עֵזֶר.

**A.6** The use of verbs to render עֵזֶר is occasionally found (cf. LXX, Tgg), but it is not as common as with עֶזְרָה.

**B.1** [nil]

## 5. Lexical/Semantic Field(s)

**A.1** [see עֵזֶר]

**A.2** עֵזֶר occurs in parallelism with גַּאֲוָה 'majesty' (Dt 33.26, 29); יעל Hiph 'to profit' (Is 30.5); סָעַד 'to support' (Ps 20.3) [cf. Targum]; מָגֵן 'shield' (Ps 33.20; 115.9, 10, 11); Piel ptc פלט (Ps 70.6); שֶׂבֶר 'hope' (Ps 146.5).

**A.3** It is set in contrast to בֹּשֶׁת 'shame' and חֶרְפָּה 'reproach' (Is 30.5).

**A.4** It appears in collocation with אֲגַף 'troop' (Ezk 12.14); נצל Hiph (Ex 18.4); ישׁע hiph (Hos 13.9); בטח 'trust' (Ps 115.9, 10, 11); ישׁועות אל God's acts of salvation, נצח אל God's victories, and משׁענת אל God's support (1QM 4.13).

**B.1** [nil]

## 6. Exegesis

**A.1** Within the OT עֵזֶר, unlike עֶזְרָה, occurs (6x: 3x in prose and 3x in the old tribal poem in Dt 33) in the Pentateuch. It also has about half its biblical occurrences in the Pss, but it is less frequent in prophecy and does not appear in Job or Lam. Its only occurrences in the historical books are in the toponym Ebenezer. At Qumran it is nearly three times as frequent as עֶזְרָה, but both occur several times (sometimes close together) in 1QM.
The same fourfold sub-division of contexts is used here as for עֶזְרָה, but 'divine' has also to include help from (and occasionally to) heavenly beings other than God.

**A.2** עֵזֶר as an earthly 'helper' and companion

עֵזֶר is used in Genesis to describe the companion that Adam needs in the garden of Eden because he was alone (Gen 2.18). This is not (as Ben-Hayyim mistakenly translates: see DCH 6, pp. 342, 869) 'woman' or 'wife', since in these contexts, God creates all kinds of animals to act as a potential עֵזֶר but none is a suitable 'helper' to be 'opposite him' / 'to face him' (Gen 2.20). The prepositional expression corresponds to the dimension of help as presence which is emphasised in some of the occurrences of the verb עָזַר.

The designation 'help' is explicitly applied to woman at Qumran, most clearly in the advice about family life in 4QInstruction (4Q416 f2 iii 21 עם עזר בשׂרכה: cf. Gen. 2.23; cf. 4Q418 f10a-b 4: 4Q418a f16b+17 3 has the same phrase, but in a different setting) but also in 4Q303 f1 10, where לאשה follows. By contrast 4Q417 f2 i 7 represents an איש עול as an undesirable source of help.

### A.3 עֵזֶר 'human military support'

עֵזֶר denotes human military support, in the sense of protection or defence in a time of need (Isa 30.5; Ezk 12.14; Dan 11.34).

The occurrence of עֵזֶר in Ezk 12.14, complicated by a Qere / Ketiv in the MT, is usually understood to be a scribal error for עֹזְריו, on the basis of evidence from the Versions (see e.g. Zimmerli *ad loc*). However, Greenberg (1983, 216) and Block (1997, 364) note that the old 3rd person masculine singular ending –*h* also occurs in Ezk 11.15 and ten times elsewhere. Ehrlich's solution that אזרה and עזרה are variants here (preferring to remove the awkward עזרה altogether) seems unwarranted. If understood as a singular noun, it would be a unique – though not impossible – use of the noun in a collective sense of 'his aids' or 'allies' (cf. the participles with plural suffixes: עֹזְרֶיהָ in Ezk 30.8 and עֹזְרָיו in 32.21). It seems most natural to translate the phrase 'his allies and all his troops' (כָל־אֲגַפָּיו), reading it as an epexegetical clause to qualify כֹל אֲשֶׁר סְבִיבֹתָיו 'all who surround him' (cf. NRSV).

In the Qumran War Scroll עֵזֶר (with *beth essentiae*) stands for the support given to foreign forces by disloyal Jews (מרשיעי ברית: 1QM 1.2) in the eschatological battle.

### A.4 עֵזֶר 'divine help/helper, defender'

עֵזֶר also denotes divine help with a sense of support, protection or rescue by someone who is on one's side, such as when the psalmist asks or affirms where his help comes from (Ps 121.1,2; for the latter see also 124.8 in A.5 below). This help is described in a general sense of being watched over and preserved from evil (Ps 121), as also in 33.20 (with מגן: cf. 115.9-11 in A.5 below).

In contexts that describe God as 'my help' with *beth essentiae*, it seems more natural to render the noun as 'helper' or 'defender' – someone who is on one's side, e.g. Ps 146.5, "Happy is he who has the God of Jacob as his helper". In Ex 18.4, this description of God as defender occurs in the context of being rescued or protected from harm: "for the God of my father was my helper, and rescued me from the sword of Pharaoh".

Protection (sc. against 'destruction' by Yahweh) is also the point in Hos. 13.9 if, as is most likely (see Syntagmatics A.11), מי is read for בי (with LXX and Sy: cf. BHS) and שׁחתך is understood as the equivalent of a passive: 'You are destroyed, O Israel, for who was your helper?' (cf. Davies 1992, 292).

In the Qumran Community Rule God and 'the angel of his truth' (Michael according to Leaney, pp. 43-44) assist 'the sons of light' in their struggle against moral evil (1QS 3.24). God and his angel also work together in creation (1QH 6.29).

**A.5** עֵזֶר 'divine military assistance'

עֵזֶר is used in the tribal blessings in Dt 33 to denote divine help in particular contexts of military support, protection or strength (Dt 33.7 – with *beth essentiae*, 33.26 [which may be what the fragmentary 5Q25 f2 1 is referring to], 29). The plural pronouns in Ps 124 suggest that v. 8 also refers to help in a national military crisis; likewise in Ps 115.9, 10, 11, עֵזֶר occurs in the context of affirming trust in YHWH over and against human strength and/or other gods. In these cases, עֵזֶ overlaps with the semantic domain of refuge and protection in the Psalter, as there is an emphasis on the choice of YHWH as the source of the psalmist's strength and protection (cf. also Ps 146.5, and e.g. Ps 28.7-8).

This may after all be the sense in the difficult second half of Ps 89.20, where God says: שׁויתי עזר על־גבור. The combination is unusual and many (e.g. Kraus) prefer to emend עזר to נֵזֶר, 'a crown' (cf. its contrasting use of the king's downfall in v. 40). Others (e.g. Miller 1970, 160; Rainey 1975, 74-75; Lipiński 2001, 17) have seen here an instance of a noun derived from עזר II which is cognate with Ug. *ġzr*, meaning 'a young hero' or 'a young man', parallel to בחור, placed 'over the warrior(s)' in a position of authority. Ginsberg (1938, 210 n.5) and Ahlström (1959, 101) suggest the meaning 'power', as already envisaged by BDB, p. 1001, comparing the very similar Ps 21.6 in another royal psalm. But the parallelism between other words in the deliverance group and being 'raised up' elsewhere suggests that the normal understanding of עזר as 'help', which is supported by the Vss, may be correct here, with גבור being the parallel word to בחור (cf. the use of the latter to describe Saul in 1 Sam. 9.2). For the military context see vv. 23-24; help as 'strengthening' is implied in v. 22. עֵזֶר in Ps 20.3 (yet another royal psalm) also belongs here.

In the War Scroll help from heaven is brought to the forces of light by God (4.13; 13.8 [par. in 4Q491 f7]; 4Q491 f11 ii 14), by angels (12.7) and by God working through an angel (17.6: Michael; cf. 13.10 (par. 4Q495): but here לעזרנו could well involve the verb). In 11Q13 2.14 the redeeming angel Melchizedek (probably another name for Michael: cf. Kobelski 1981, 71-74; Steudel 2000, 535-36), in his conquest of the powers of Belial, receives the help of כול אלי [הצדק], 'all the gods/angels [of righteousness]'.

**A.6** In the OT the 'help' denoted by עֵזֶ often takes the form of rescue or refuge (note especially the association with הציל in Exod. 18.4; Ps. 33.20; 70.6 [cf. פלט in v. 2], with ישׁע in Dt 33.29 and Ps 20 [v. 10] and with מגן in Dt 33.29; Ps 33.20; 115.9-11). But at Qumran these kinds of help are barely present at all, only perhaps in 11Q13 2.14 (with הציל in ll. 6 and 13). Support in a more general sense (as in Gen. 2) is more widely attested there (cf. A.2 above), and in the military contexts of the War Scroll the aid of allies is directed towards winning the inevitable victory, not escaping danger (as also in Dt 33, with ישׁע in v. 29 and in the royal psalms, with ישׁע in Ps 20 [v. 10]).

**A.7** Like עֶזְרָה, the help expressed by עֵזֶ is sometimes closely related to the presence of its provider, whether human or divine. Thus the woman who proves to be, at least most of the

time, man's true helpmeet in Gen. 2 is given to be 'with him' (3.12), he 'clings' to her and they become 'one flesh' (2.24; cf. 4.1). Companionship is also central to the echoes of this passage in 4QInstruction (see A.2 above). God's help comes to the king from his 'sanctuary' on Zion (Ps 20.3), where he dwells; and he gives help and protection to the man on a journey (Ps 121.1-2) by being 'at his right hand' (v. 5). Perhaps this is also signified to the eschatological warriors by having עזר אל inscribed on one of their banners (1QM 4.13).

**A.8** The personal sense, in which עֵזֶר virtually means 'help*er*', is also attested in a wide range of passages (Gen 2.18, 20; Dt 33.7; Ezk 12.14; Ps 33.20; 70.6; 115.9-11; 1QS 3.24; 1QM 13.10; 4Q303 1.10; also in the instances with *beth essentiae*: Ex 18.4; Dt 33.26; Hos 13.9; Ps 146.5).

**A.9** Occasionally a failure to give help that was expected is noted (Gen 2.20; Is 30.5; Hos 13.9).

**A.10** There is one case of עֵזֶר being followed by מן and a word for enemies (Dt 33.7), a construction which brings it very close to some of the main members of the 'deliverance' group like נצל Hiph. The explanation is probably the same as for the rare parallels with עָזַר (see Exegesis A.3(b)) and עֶזְרָה (see Conclusion A.4), that is a pregnant use in which a noun with the sense 'deliverance' is assumed to intervene before the מן.

**A.11** There are three cases where עֵזֶר preceded by ל functions like a verb (infinitive). Two are in unvocalised texts (1QM 13.8, 10) and could be parsed as verbal forms. The third, Is 30.5, has לְעֵזֶר in parallel to the infinitive להועיל, which illustrates the equivalence very clearly (cf. עֶזְרָה, Exegesis A.7).


## 7. Conclusion

There appear to be four distinctive uses of this noun in the HB: human helper, military support, divine protection and divine assistance in battle. These are all connected by the broader notion of help in the sense of support or assistance. As far as its situation is concerned, עֵזֶר has a wider application than words for 'deliverance', as it need not presuppose a situation of trouble or distress – this would be a special case – and it can be given (as 'protection') to avert such things. It can also refer to 'support' in a very general sense, as in Gn 2, where 'two are better than one'. (See also the Conclusions for עָזַר and עֶזְרָה.)

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