



## זרע

## זרע זרה

There are two **Hebrew** roots זרע (*zara'*) in the Bible. Apparently they both exist in cognate languages but HAW Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament submits for *zara'* I that "the etymology of *zr'* is most puzzling," and for *zara'* II that "the etymology of this root is unclear". What does seem clear is that a Hebrew audience would probably see no reason to place our two roots very far apart, and would doubtlessly have seen a firm connection between the two. Then there is one root זרה (*zara*), which appears to be quite kindred in meaning to זרע (*zara'* I):

## זרע I

The verb זרע (*zara'* I) means to scatter seed (Jeremiah 12:13), sow a field (Exodus 23:10, Leviticus 25:3), produce seed (Genesis 1:29), fructify (Jeremiah 31:27), impregnate (Numbers 5:28), or bear a child (Leviticus 12:2). It's also used to describe the act of sowing a city with salt in order to thoroughly destroy it (Judges 9:45). Figuratively, this verb is used to describe God's planting of **Israel** in **Palestine** (Hosea 2:23), or his scattering of Israel among the nations (Zechariah 10:9). Our verb is also used to describe sowing justice (Proverbs 11:18), righteousness (Hosea 10:12), light (Psalm 97:11), wickedness (Proverbs 22:8), trouble (Job 4:8), and wind (Hosea 8:7).

Its derivatives are:

- The masculine noun זרע (*zera'*), meaning a sowing (Genesis 47:24, Ezekiel 17:5), seed (Numbers 24:7, Isaiah 55:10), sperm (Numbers 5:28, Leviticus 22:4), one child (Genesis 4:25), or broader: offspring (Genesis 3:15, Exodus 32:13) or even broader: posterity (Genesis 38:8, Exodus 28:43). It may mean family (Genesis 17:12), pedigree (Ezra 2:59), or a community (Ezra 9:2, Isaiah 1:4).
- The masculine noun זרוע (*zerua'*), denoting that what is sown (Leviticus 11:37, Isaiah 61:11 only).
- The masculine noun זרע (*zeroa'*), which occurs only in plural, זרעים (*zeroa'im*), meaning vegetables (Daniel 1:12 only).
- The masculine noun זרען (*zer'on*), which also occurs only in plural, זרעונים (*zer'onim*), also meaning vegetables (Daniel 1:16 only). The difference between these two nouns is not clear.
- The masculine noun מזרע (*mizra'*), literally meaning a place of sowing (Isaiah 19:7 only).

# זרע II

The root זרע (*zara'* II) isn't used as verb in the Bible but in [Arabic](#) it exists (spelled slightly different than the equivalent of *zara'* I) with the meaning of to extend or stretch out, especially of an arm or leg. Manually sowing seed is done by doing exactly that: stretching out the arm, and the connection with the previous root will not have escaped Hebrew poets. It may even be that the act of producing seed and sowing it, or producing offspring and sending it off into the world, may figuratively have been closely associated with the act of extending one's arm. In the Hebrew world, the arm was a symbol of strength (see below), and so was offspring (Genesis 49:3).

The derivatives of this root that exist in the Bible are:

- The (mostly) feminine noun זרוע (*zeroa'*) or זרע (*zeroa'*), meaning arm. This word is surprisingly infrequently used to denote the actual human arm (Judges 15:14, Isaiah 9:19, Psalm 18:35); most occurrences of this word are figurative: the arm as the seat of human strength (Job 26:2, 1 Samuel 2:31, Ezekiel 22:6), [YHWH's](#) arm as instrument of deliverance and judgment (Deuteronomy 4:34, Ezekiel 20:33) or support (Isaiah 40:11), the force of nations and armies (Daniel 11:13 and 11:31). On occasion this noun may also denote the shoulder of man (2 Kings 9:24) or animal (Numbers 6:19, Deuteronomy 18:3).
- The feminine noun אזרוע ('*ezroa'*), also meaning arm. This curious word appears only twice in the Bible, in Job 31:22 and Jeremiah 32:21. The letter ו (*waw*) often is inserted in a word without changing the essential meaning, but why in only these two cases the prosthetic א (*aleph*) became attached to the regular זרע (*zr'*) is unclear.

Note that זרע (*zara'*) occurs in the Septuagint and other Greek texts as σπειρω (*speiro*), from whence comes διασπειρω (*diaspeiro*), from whence comes the familiar noun διασπορα (*diaspora*), meaning a scattering, and ultimately the English verb to disperse.

# זרה

The verb זרה (*zara*) means to scatter or winnow, and seems not that far removed from זרע (*zara'* I), except that the scattering done in זרע (*zara'*) yields produce and offspring, whereas the scattering done in זרה (*zara*) removes debris. Our verb זרה (*zara*) is used to winnow barley (Ruth 3:2) or fodder (Isaiah 30:24). [Isaiah](#) even foretells how Israel will grind mountains and winnow them like chaff (Isaiah 40:16), but [Jeremiah](#) sees how Israel itself will be winnowed (Jeremiah 15:7).

The relation between the two verbs זרה (*zara*) and זרע (*zara'*) is made strikingly clear by the prophets [Ezekiel](#) and [Zechariah](#), who both record Israel being scattered among the nations. But Ezekiel saw Israel go into exile and uses זרה (*zara*; Ezekiel 36:19), whereas Zechariah saw Israel return and uses זרע (*zara'*; Zechariah 10:9).

Our verb זרה (*zara*) yields one derivative: the masculine noun מזרה (*mizreh*), meaning winnowing-fork (Isaiah 30:24 and Jeremiah 15:7 only).

## Associated Biblical names

- ♂ ♀ Jezreel
- ☺ Nazarene

⏪ Nazareth

⏩ Zerubbabel

זרובבל

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