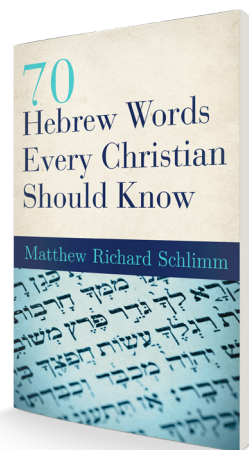


This is one example of a Hebrew word and its explanation from *70 Hebrew Words Every Christian Should Know* by Matthew Richard Schlimm.



The 70 Hebrew words presented in this book appear more than thirty thousand times in the Bible. They show up in nearly fifteen thousand verses. More than 60 percent of the verses in the Old Testament contain at least one of the seventy words included in this book. Learning these words help readers experience scripture in new and broader ways.

**Find out more and read the introduction at:
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Horses

It's not just practices like walking that pick up a variety of associations based on the culture in view. It's also physical objects and organisms. (See **Objects and Cultures**.)

Objects and Cultures

“Words which refer to concrete physical objects must be defined in ways which reflect their symbolic value to a particular culture.”²³⁵

—Carolyn Leeb

This even includes horses. Many Hebrew students learn the following Hebrew word early in their studies because it's useful in noun paradigms:

	English	Hebrew	Hebrew Transliteration
55.	horse	סוס	<i>sus</i>

There's little doubt that this word is best translated “horse.” Both *sus* and “horse” refer to the same animal. Yet, this animal serves very different purposes in biblical and modern societies.

Today, horses are associated with racing and hobbies. Traditional societies including the Amish use horses for transportation and farming. However, in developed cultures cars and tractors have replaced much of what horses used to accomplish. Consequently, for most people, horseback riding is more likely to take place while vacationing in a scenic area rather than amid everyday life. Horses may be ridden on dude ranches out west, or by police in busy cities, but they typically are connected with sport and entertainment today.

Horses: Then and Now

“In the Bible, the horse functioned only as a military machine and not as a power source for agricultural or other daily tasks.”²³⁶

—Oded Borowski

In biblical times, horses were rarely connected with races or hobbies. (See **Horses: Then and Now**.) In fact, they weren't even used first and foremost as instruments of transport or agriculture.²³⁷ Instead, horses served military purposes.²³⁸ They were the closest thing to a tank in the biblical world. The Hebrew word *sus* commonly appears in verses that talk about swords, arrows, bows, shields, weapons, warriors, or battles.²³⁹ (See **Figure 12**, which depicts King Asurbanipal of the Assyrians [a superpower to Jerusalem's north] using a spear to defeat a lion in the seventh century BCE.²⁴⁰)



Figure 12

Practices and Objects

So, rather than seeing horses as racing or hobby animals, the Bible presents horses as a means of warcraft. Theologically, the Bible makes three very important and related statements about horses. First, God has given Israel victory over enemies with horses. Many verses talk about God rescuing Israel from enemy warhorses. Exodus 15:19 is typical: “When the horses [*sus*] of Pharaoh with his chariots and his chariot drivers went into the sea, the LORD brought back the waters of the sea upon them; but the Israelites walked through the sea on dry ground” (NRSV). A number of verses commemorate these sorts of victories (Exod 14:9, 23; 15:1, 21; Deut 11:4; Josh 11:4, 6, 9; Ps 76:6 [7 Heb.]).

The second theological statement regards not the past but the future. People should trust God to provide victory, not depend on horses: “Some trust in chariots and some in horses (*sus*), but we trust in the name of the LORD our God” (Ps 20:7 [8 Heb.] NIV). People wanting to live out the Bible today might say, “Some trust in tanks and some in military drones, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God.”²⁴¹ (See **YHWH Versus Horses.**)

YHWH Versus Horses

“In all parts of the biblical tradition, it is affirmed that the power of Yahweh will defeat oppressive kings who have horses and chariots.”²⁴²

—Walter Brueggemann

In the prophets, the worst thing people could do is trust in the military might that comes from horses, rather than rely on God:

Doom [*Hoy*] to those going down to Egypt for help!

They rely on horses [*sus*],

trust in chariots because they are many,

and on riders because they are very strong.

But they don't look to the holy one of Israel;

they don't seek the LORD.

But God also knows how to bring disaster [*ra*];

he has not taken back his words.

God will rise up against the house of evildoers [*raa*]

and against the help of those who do wrong.

Egypt is human and not divine;

their horses [*sus*] are flesh and not spirit [*ruakh*].

The LORD will extend his hand;

the helper will stumble,

those helped will fall,

and they will all die together. (Isa 31:1-3 CEB; cf. Deut 20:1; Ezek 17:15)

Chapter 7

Although horses were immensely attractive militarily, they did not compare to the power that comes from God.

Third and related, horses are forbidden in Israel (Deut 17:16). In an act of apostasy, King Solomon boldly disobeyed this command (1 Kgs 4:26 [5:6 Heb.]; 10:25-29). Subsequent kings did as well, so that Isaiah later mourns how the land is filled with not only idols but also horses (Isa 2:7b-8a). Micah's vision of God purifying Israel includes these words: "In that day," declares the LORD, "I will destroy your horses [*sus*] from among you and demolish your chariots" (Mic 5:10 [9 Heb.] NIV). Just as Jesus refuses to take up the sword in the New Testament (Matt 26:52; Luke 22:51; John 18:11; cf. Matt 5:39), God wants Israel free of horses in the Old Testament.

Essential to understanding these Old Testament passages is that horses served a very different function in biblical Israel than in the modern world. The words "horse" and *sus* refer to the same animal: dictionary definitions fit perfectly. However, the function of a horse in each society differs markedly. The Hebrew word *sus* belonged to a similar field of ideas as words like "tank," "missile," "bomber," and "drone" today. The challenging message of the Bible—especially for those who live in countries with advanced militaries—is that we should neither trust in our nation's military might nor invest in military weaponry but instead rely on the God who is more powerful than any weapon.

We hope you enjoyed this sample.

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