

Study Guide: Spiritual Strongholds

March 4, 2026

This study guide explores the biblical concept of strongholds, tracing their definition from physical Old Testament fortifications to the spiritual refuge found in Jesus Christ. It further examines how individuals construct personal strongholds—attitudes, habits, and lies—that can act as barricades against the influence of the Holy Spirit.

Short-Answer Review Quiz

1. Based on the Old Testament context provided, what were the primary physical characteristics and purposes of a stronghold?
 2. In the book of Psalms, how does David transform the traditional imagery of a stronghold?
 3. Describe the "broken cisterns" mentioned in Jeremiah 2:13 and explain what they symbolize in a spiritual sense.
 4. According to the text, what is the spiritual implication of the common phrase, "That's just who I am"?
 5. How does the Apostle Paul use Roman military technology to describe the "flaming darts" of the enemy in Ephesians 6:16?
 6. What is the danger of returning to one's seat after a symbolic act of prayer without actually surrendering personal attitudes?
 7. Explain the process by which a lie matures into a fortified stronghold within a person's life.
 8. What are some examples of "counterfeit strongholds" that people rely on today instead of God?
 9. How can a personal stronghold, such as a bad temper or a critical spirit, obstruct a believer's ability to witness to others?
 10. Why is Jesus Christ described as a superior stronghold compared to any human coping mechanism or physical structure?
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Answer Key

1. In the Old Testament, a stronghold was a physical, fortified structure, often elevated and defensive, such as a fort. It served as a place of refuge where a population would retreat for safety during times of trouble or enemy advancement.
 2. David shifted the imagery of a stronghold from a physical stone structure to a personal relationship with the Divine. He declared in the Psalms that the Lord is his rock, his fortress, and his deliverer, making God the person to whom he runs for protection.
 3. Broken cisterns are cracked reservoirs that are incapable of holding water, rendering them useless for survival. Spiritually, they represent the worthless idols and self-reliant behaviors people choose when they abandon God, the fountain of living waters.
 4. This phrase often identifies a long-standing behavior or attitude that has become a fortified part of a person's identity. These "strongholds of the self" often serve as excuses to avoid the necessary changes that come with following Jesus Christ.
 5. Paul compares temptations to Roman javelins wrapped in fuel-soaked material and ignited. When these "darts" hit a target, the fuel splatters and spreads the fire, illustrating how a single lie or temptation can rapidly expand and cause widespread damage.
 6. Performing a symbolic act of submission at the altar is ineffective if the individual unconsciously carries their old attitudes and prejudices back with them. Without true surrender, the stronghold remains a wall between the believer and Christ.
 7. A lie begins as a singular deception that is fueled by specific attitudes and language over time. Eventually, these lies are repeated and reinforced until they become a cornerstone of an individual's identity, making them difficult to escape.
 8. Modern counterfeit strongholds include reliance on wealth, social media presence, power, human strength, and worldly alliances. These provide a false sense of security that eventually fails, much like a leaking, broken cistern.
 9. Personal strongholds like anger or a sour attitude act as a barricade that prevents others from seeing the light of Christ. If a believer's behavior is harsh or unyielding, it creates an obstruction that hinders their ability to properly share the Gospel.
 10. Jesus Christ is the ultimate stronghold because He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, and His protection is eternal. Unlike physical buildings or human systems that eventually collapse, the Savior provides a secure refuge that never lets His people down.
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Essay Questions for Deeper Reflection

1. **The Evolution of Divine Refuge:** Analyze the transition from the physical strongholds of 1 Samuel to the spiritual declarations in the Psalms. How does viewing God as a "Person" rather than a "Place" change the nature of Christian faith?
 2. **Identifying Modern Idolatry:** Using the imagery of Jeremiah, discuss how contemporary society constructs "broken cisterns." Compare these to the "fountain of living waters" and discuss why human efforts often fail to provide spiritual satisfaction.
 3. **The Anatomy of a Spiritual Lie:** Explore the metaphor of the "flaming dart" in the context of personal deception. How do individual biases and repeated behaviors reinforce these lies, and what role does the "shield of faith" play in extinguishing them?
 4. **Barriers to Transformation:** Examine the speaker's assertion that strongholds can be "barricades" between a believer and those they care for. How do unaddressed attitudes, such as anger or a need for control, impact the Great Commission?
 5. **The Architecture of Identity:** Discuss the process of "self-evaluation" mentioned in the text. How can a believer distinguish between their God-given identity and the "strongholds" they have built around themselves over a lifetime?
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Glossary of Key Terms

- **Broken Cistern:** A metaphor from Jeremiah 2:13 referring to cracked water reservoirs; it represents worthless, human-made systems of belief or security that fail to sustain life.
 - **Counterfeit Stronghold:** Any worldly source of security—such as wealth, power, or idols—that people trust in place of God.
 - **Flaming Dart:** Based on Ephesians 6:16, a metaphor for the temptations and lies of the enemy that are designed to hit a person and spread like splashing fuel.
 - **Fountain of Living Waters:** A biblical title for God, identifying Him as the only source of true spiritual life and sustenance.
 - **Refuge:** A place or person providing protection or shelter from pursuit, danger, or trouble; in the New Testament context, this is found in Jesus Christ.
 - **Stronghold (Old Testament):** A physical, fortified, and elevated structure used for defense and protection during war.
 - **Stronghold (Spiritual):** In a negative sense, a fortified attitude, habit, or lie that creates a wall between a person and God; in a positive sense, it refers to the Lord as a protective fortress for the believer.
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Note: All Scripture references are based on the New King James Version (NKJV). All references to God the Father, Jesus Christ the Son, and the Holy Spirit have been capitalized to reflect Their divine nature.