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### In the Strength of the Lord

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## Chapter 34

# IN THE STRENGTH OF THE LORD

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*And in the strength of the Lord they did contend against their enemies, until they had slain many thousands of the Lamanites. And it came to pass that they did contend against the Lamanites until they had driven them out of all the lands of their inheritance.*  
(Words Of Mormon 1:14)

The Book of Mormon frequently notes that the Nephites fought against their enemies “in the strength of the Lord” (Mosiah 9:17; 10:10-11; Alma 46:20; 60:16; 61:18; 3 Nephi 3:12; 4:10).<sup>1</sup> But when they were disobedient, the Lord withheld his strength from them and they could not withstand their enemies (Helaman 7:22; Mormon 2:26). According to Jarom 1:7, they were able to withstand their enemies because of the faith of their leaders. In later times, it was a practice among the Nephites, when they were righteous, to choose prophets to lead their armies (3 Nephi 3:19). Mormon was one of those leaders.

### **THE LORD STRENGTHENS THE NEPHITE ARMIES**

During the Amlicite war, despite the “great strength” of the Amlicites, “the Lord did strengthen the hand of the Nephites, that they slew the Amlicites with great slaughter, that they began to flee before them” and lost nearly twice as many men as the Nephites (Alma 2:17-19). When the Amlicites joined with the

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<sup>1</sup> Though his people fought “in the strength of the Lord,” Zeniff nevertheless admired “the Lamanites [who] knew nothing concerning the Lord, nor the strength of the Lord, therefore they depended upon their own strength. Yet they were a strong people, as to the strength of men” (Mosiah 10:11).

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Lamanites and became innumerable (Alma 2:27, 35), “nevertheless, the Nephites being strengthened by the hand of the Lord, having prayed mightily to him that he would deliver them out of the hands of their enemies, therefore the Lord did hear their cries, and did strengthen them, and the Lamanites and the Amlicites did fall before them” (Alma 2:28). When Amlici engaged Alma in personal combat, Alma prayed to the Lord to save him, and “he was strengthened” and slew Amlici (Alma 2:28-31).

The Lord’s assistance to the Nephites was particularly evident in the great war that took place in the days of captain Moroni. Helaman reported to Moroni that his men prayed “to God, that he would strengthen us, and deliver us out of the hands of our enemies” (Alma 58:10) and wrote, “We trust God will deliver us, notwithstanding the weakness of our armies, yea, and deliver us out of the hands of our enemies (Alma 58:37). He further noted how they had miraculously regained their lands (Alma 59:3).

Moroni himself noted that those who trust in God will be delivered from their enemies (Alma 61:13) and that victory comes to those who go forth in the strength of the Lord (Alma 60:16). He noted that God had often delivered the Nephites from their enemies (Alma 60:20-21). When he had to leave his armies for a time to put down a rebellion in the land of Zarahemla, he proposed to leave the strength and blessing of God on his men, so “none other power can operate against them” because of their faith (Alma 60:25-26). So Moroni gave his subordinates, Lehi and Teancum, power to conduct the war “according to the Spirit of God” (Alma 61:15, 21), and went forth against the dissenters “in the strength of God” (Alma 61:17-18).

In a subsequent war, the Nephites repented and prayed God to deliver them from their enemies in battle (3 Nephi 3:25; 4:8). They met the Lamanites “in the strength of the Lord” (3 Nephi 4:10) and were rescued by God (3 Nephi 4:30-33).

The scriptures often declare that God helps his followers in

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their battles.<sup>2</sup> In the Bible, he is often called “Lord of hosts/armies.”<sup>3</sup> David, who had been given strength to defeat the giant (*Ben-Sirach* 47:5), approached Goliath with these words:

Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield; but I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied. This day will the Lord deliver thee into mine hand; and I will smite thee . . . that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel. And all this assembly shall know that the Lord saveth not with sword and spear: for the battle is the Lord's, and he will give you into our hands. (1 Samuel 17:45-47)

When ancient heroes failed to keep the Lord's commandments, they lost the divine assistance that made them powerful. Thus, when Samson forsook his Nazirite oath, he was left powerless (Judges 16:15-21). In the last days of the Nephites, when they had become wicked, Mormon recorded, “the strength of

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<sup>2</sup> Deuteronomy 7:2, 23; 20:1; 31:3-8; Joshua 11:6; Judges 20:28; 1 Samuel 7:10; 14:23; 5:19; 2 Samuel 5:23-25; 1 Kings 5:3; 8:44-45; 1 Chronicles 14:10; 2 Chronicles 13:13-16; 18:31; 20:15-17; Psalms 18:16-19; 24:8; 105:10-15; 140:7; Haggai 2:22; Zechariah 14:3; Jarom 1:7; Omni 1:7; Mosiah 9:17; 10:10, 19; Alma 2:28; 19:27; 48:16; 49:28; 60:20-21; 61:21; 3 Nephi 3:21, 25; 4:8. In early days, Israelite priests went into battle with the people, sometimes taking the ark of the covenant with them (Joshua 6:4-21; 1 Samuel 4:3-8; 14:18-20; 2 Chronicles 13:13-16). The priests were to admonish the people before battle (Deuteronomy 20:1-4).

<sup>3</sup> In the Bible, God is often called “the Lord of hosts,” referring to the armies of heaven (e.g., 1 Samuel 17:45). The Hebrew term is transliterated “Lord of Sabaoth” in Romans 9:29; James 5:4; D&C 87:7; 88:2; 95:7; 98:2. Compare *History of the Church* 2:381, 426-7; 3:119; 5:111, where Joseph Smith spoke of the “armies of heaven,” and *History of the Church* 7:271, where Brigham Young spoke of the “God of the armies of Israel.”

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the Lord was not with us . . . therefore we had become weak like unto our brethren [the Lamanites]" (Mormon 2:26).

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The Lord is also said to have strengthened individuals. The feats of strength performed by Samson are perhaps more well-known than those of any other Israelite. Samson, endowed by God with great strength, twice broke the cords with which he had been bound (Judges 16:4-12). At a place he named Lehi, "the spirit of the Lord came mightily" on Samson and he broke his bonds and slew his captors (Judges 15:14-15). In the Book of Mormon, the Lord gave Nephi strength sufficient to break the bands with which his brothers had restrained him (1 Nephi 7:17-18).

A similar story is told of Alma and Amulek, who "had power given unto them, insomuch that they could not be confined in dungeons; neither was it possible that any man could slay them; nevertheless they did not exercise their power until they were bound in bonds and cast into prison. Now, this was done that the Lord might show forth his power in them" (Alma 8:31). Receiving strength from the Lord after prayer, they were able to break the cords binding them. An earthquake then precipitated the fall of the prison and the inhabitants of the city of Ammonihah fled in fear from the two missionaries (Alma 14:26-29; see 26:29).<sup>4</sup> This power over the elements is noted earlier in the same chapter, when Amulek suggested that he and Alma "stretch forth our hands, and exercise the power of God which is in us" to save the believers from the flames, but the Spirit constrained Alma (Alma 14:10-11).

Most scriptural and pseudepigraphic texts agree that the strength of Israelite heroes came from God. Nephi wrote that he was "a man large in stature" and had "received much strength of

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<sup>4</sup> The sons of Mosiah had been stoned, bound with strong cords, cast into prison, "and through the power and wisdom of God we have been delivered again" (Alma 26:29).

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the Lord” (1 Nephi 4:31). In the pseudepigraphic *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, Simeon declared, “And I became extraordinarily strong; I did not hold back from any exploit, nor did I fear anything. My heart was firm, my courage was high, and my feelings were dispassionate. For by the Most High, manly courage is given to men in soul and body” (*Testament of Simeon* 2:3-5). Simeon’s brother Judah, whose reputed feats of strength outnumber those of others, introduced the account of his accomplishments by saying that the Lord had blessed him (*Testament of Judah* 2:1). Isaac had blessed Judah with the words, “May the Lord give you might and strength to tread upon all who hate you . . . May all the nations fear before your face, and all of the nations tremble” (*Jubilees* 31:18). *Testament Judah* 3:10 records that his father Jacob “saw in a vision concerning me that a powerful angel accompanied me everywhere so that no one might touch me.”

Nephi, noting how the Lord saved his father from those who wanted to slay him, wrote that because of their faith, the Lord makes his chosen ones “mighty even to the power of deliverance” (1 Nephi 1:20). Two Book of Mormon prophets, Nephi (1 Nephi 17:48-55) and Abinadi (Mosiah 13:1-6), could not be touched by their enemies because they were filled with the power of God. The sons of the younger Helaman, Nephi and Lehi, could not be slain (Helaman 5:23-24). Nephi later was taken from the midst of a crowd by the Spirit of the Lord (Helaman 10:16). The Lord protected Samuel the Lamanite from the stones and arrows cast at him by the inhabitants of Zarahemla (Helaman 16:2). Wicked people tried several times to kill the three translated Nephite disciples of Christ, but they survived every attempt (3 Nephi 28:19-22; 4 Nephi 1:30-33). They, like the biblical Daniel (Daniel 6:16-23), were unmolested by the wild beasts into whose den they were cast.

Another notable miracle is the preservation of the two thousand and sixty stripling warriors who, led by the elder Helaman, “fought as if with the strength of God . . . miraculous

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strength . . . with such power” against the Lamanites. While two hundred of them received many wounds, not one died (Alma 56:56).

When the sons of Mosiah went on a mission to the Lamanites, the Lord promised their father that he would protect them (Mosiah 28:7; Alma 17:35; 19:22-23). They received power from the Lord to accomplish things impossible for mortals. Ammon saw the attack of a band of Lamanite robbers at the waters of Sebus as an opportunity to demonstrate his power to gain the attention of his host, king Lamoni (Alma 17:29). He slew six with sling stones and cut off the arms of a number of the men as they attacked him, slaying their leader in the process (Alma 17:34-39).

The king’s servants, who witnessed his feats of strength, were “astonished at his power” (Alma 17:36) and told Lamoni of Ammon’s “expertness and great strength” and his “power,” expressing their belief that he could not be slain (Alma 18:3, 20, 22; 19:4, 15, 22-23). Lamoni declared to the young missionary, “I know, in the strength of the Lord thou canst do all things” (Alma 20:4; cf. 18:35). The queen also told him, “thou hast power to do many mighty works” in the name of God (Alma 19:4).

Ammon later declared, “I know that I am nothing; as to my strength, I am weak; therefore I will not boast of myself, but I will boast of my God, for in his strength I can do all things” (Alma 26:12). It was a lesson lost on later Nephites who, when they boasted in their own strength,<sup>5</sup> were left in their own strength and lost to the Lamanites (Helaman 4:13), who became as strong as the Nephites (Helaman 4:26; see also Mosiah 11:19; Helaman 16:15; Mormon 3:8; 4:8; cf. D&C 4:13).

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<sup>5</sup> Alma counseled his son Shiblon, “Do not boast in your own wisdom, nor of your much strength” (Alma 38:11; compare D&C 105:24).

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### *CONCLUSION*

From this brief survey, we can see that the Nephites followed the ancient Israelite principle of turning their defense over to God during wartime, trusting that he would deliver them if they were faithful.