

Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ! In this edition I'll be looking at swords in the scriptures.

I'm extending an invitation for submissions to be published in The Gospel Notes Newsletter. The primary criteria for inclusion are these:

1. It should be oriented towards the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
2. It should use the scriptures as a source of information.
3. It should include the references for any quoted 3<sup>rd</sup> party sources.
4. It should not be political.

Also, if you have any Gospel subjects that you would like me to cover in the Newsletter, please let me know.

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Did you know that there are about 400 references, direct or indirect, to **swords** in the Inspired Version of the Bible, 405 in the King James version, and 147 in the Book of Mormon?

That's a lot of swords.

Most of the time we identify swords as offensive weapons, whereas we think of shields as defensive weapons. (65 references to shields in the King James, 64 in the Inspired Version, and 12 in the Book of Mormon.)

Granted, there is a lot of recorded history of wars in ancient Israel. For example, out of the numbers listed above, 33 are references to swords in the King James New Testament, 30 in the Inspired Version New Testament, and only about 7 in the Book of Mormon/New Testament timeframe (measured from the time of Christ's visit).

Not all of the swords mentioned in the scriptures are literal, physical, swords though. Some of the references are of the more indirect variety, such as referring to the word of God being a double-edged sword, or the "sword of vengeance" and so on. It is a common enough weapon that this was something everyone would have been familiar with.

Jesus spoke to this in both a direct an indirect manner

Matthew 26 (verses 51-54 in the King James Version)

49 And behold, one of them which were with Jesus stretched out his hand, and drew his sword, and struck a servant of the high priest, and smote off his ear.

50 Then said Jesus unto him, **Put up again thy sword into its place; for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword.**

51 Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?

52 But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?

This is the verse often paraphrased to say, “He that lives by the sword shall die by the sword.” The more indirect meaning is that those who live for violence will die from violence. But Jesus also literally meant that they had to let things go as intended for the crucifixion to be fulfilled.

The first reference to swords is in the very early history written by Moses. We find it shortly after Adam and Eve were cast out of the garden.

(Inspired Version)

Genesis 3:31 So I drove out the man, and I placed at the east of the garden of Eden, **cherubim and a flaming sword**, which turned every way to keep the way of the tree of life.

(King James Version)

Genesis 3:24 So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden **Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way**, to keep the way of the tree of life.

It is not entirely clear from this passage if there were two Cherubs (being called Cherubim for the plural) and that each held a flaming sword, or if there were the two Cherubim and just the one flaming sword that itself served to guard the entry point. In most cases you would think that there would be one sword per angel, which makes sense when later details about the temple in Jerusalem are discussed.

In this case the flaming sword is used to keep man from re-entering the garden. It is not being used as an offensive weapon, but as a defensive one. More to the point it is used as a deterrent rather than being primarily used for actual battle. Though, I suppose, if Adam or Eve had tried to force their way past the sword it would not have gone well for them. In this case it serves as a reminder that God is working to prevent them from doing harm to themselves because, we learn from the Book of Mormon, if they had re-entered the garden and partaken of the fruit of the tree of life, the entire plan of salvation would come crashing down.

Alma 19

82 Now behold, my son, I will explain this thing unto thee: For behold, after the Lord God sent our first parents forth from the garden of Eden to till the ground, from whence they were taken, yea, he drove out the man, and he placed at the east end of the garden of Eden, cherubim and a flaming sword, which turned every way, to keep the tree of life.

83 Now we see that the man had become as God, knowing good and evil; **and lest he should put forth his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever, the Lord God placed cherubim and the flaming sword, that he should not partake of the fruit;**

84 And thus we see that there was a time granted unto man to repent, yea, a probationary time, a time to repent and serve God.

85 For behold, if Adam had put forth his hand immediately and partook of the tree of life, **he would have lived forever according to the word of God, having no space for repentance;**

86 Yea, **and also the word of God would have been void, and the great plan of salvation would have been frustrated.**

This first reference to a sword is to serve as a precautionary example so that man might not do something worse than he had already done.

Is there something special about the fact that this was a flaming sword? Surely a non-flaming sword would also accomplish the task. The flame likely shows the actions of the Spirit of God, which is often described as a flaming fire (see Deuteronomy 4:24 and Hebrews 12:29). It seems apparent that this sword (or swords) was/were wielded by the Cherubim, which is a type of angel that is noted for having two wings and apparently large stature.

There is a callback to this Garden Sentry in the temple that was built in Jerusalem. Before I get into that, I should mention that before the temple was built in Jerusalem, the “portable temple” -- the **tabernacle** -- that the Israelites carried with them through the wilderness for 40 years also had Cherubim, but these may have been somewhat miniaturized as we will see in a bit. Remember, this had to be carried from place to place.

Exodus 25

10 And they shall make an ark of shittim wood; **two cubits and a half shall be the length thereof,** and a cubit and a half the breadth thereof, and a cubit and a half the height thereof.

11 And thou shalt overlay it with pure gold; within and without shalt thou overlay it and shalt make upon it a crown of gold round about.

12 And thou shalt cast four rings of gold for it and put them in the four corners thereof; and two rings shall be in the one side of it, and two rings in the other side of it.

13 And thou shalt make staves of shittim wood and overlay them with gold.

14 And thou shalt put the staves into the rings by the sides of the ark, that the ark may be borne with them.

15 The staves shall be in the rings of the ark; they shall not be taken from it.

16 And thou shalt put into the ark the testimony which I shall give thee.

17 And thou shalt make a **mercy seat of pure gold; two cubits and a half shall be the length** thereof, and a cubit and a half the breadth thereof.

18 **And thou shalt make two cherubim of gold--of beaten work shalt thou make them--in the two ends of the mercy seat.**

19 **And make one cherub on the one end and the other cherub on the other end;** even of the mercy seat shall ye make the cherubim on the two ends thereof.

20 **And the cherubim shall stretch forth their wings on high, covering the mercy seat with their wings; and their faces shall look one to another;** toward the mercy seat shall the faces of the cherubim be.

21 And thou shalt put the mercy seat above upon the ark; and in the ark thou shalt put the testimony that I shall give thee.

You'll take note here that the two Cherubim were positioned on the Mercy Seat, which sat atop the Ark of the Covenant. Essentially, it was a formed chair made from gold, and this "chair" was only 2 ½ cubits wide (roughly 3 feet 9 inches – 1.143 meters) or possibly as much as 4 feet 7 inches – 1.4 meters wide. In other words, it isn't much larger than a cedar chest you might put at the foot of your bed. On the two sides of this are two Cherubim, facing each other and covering the Mercy seat with their wings, presumably bent inwards towards one another until their tips touched. In other words, they were not nearly as large as the ones placed in the Temple, as we shall see momentarily.

For the Temple in Jerusalem, they made two Cherubim out of beaten gold to stand in the Holy of Holies, each of which stood 10 cubits high and had a wing span of 10 cubits, and they were placed side-to-side. 10 cubits is about 15 feet, or for the metric minded that is roughly 4.6 meters. Considering that a tall man is less than half of that, it would be intimidating indeed. This is assuming a cubit at roughly 18 inches – 1.5 feet. Other measures suggest it might have been as much as 22 inches, which would make 10 cubits become just over 18 feet or about 5.5 meters.

2 Chronicles 3

10 And in the most holy house he made two cherubim of image work and overlaid them with gold.

11 And the wings of the cherubim were twenty cubits long; **one wing of the one cherub was five cubits, reaching to the wall of the house; and the other wing was, likewise, five cubits,** reaching to the wing of the other cherub.

12 And one wing of the other cherub was five cubits, reaching to the wall of the house; and the other wing was five cubits also, joining to the wing of the other cherub.

13 The wings of these cherubim spread themselves forth twenty cubits; and they stood on their feet, and their faces were inward.

1 Kings 6:26 **The height of the one cherub was ten cubits, and so was it of the other cherub.**

The purpose of this is to show that if this Temple Cherubim is a faithful representation of the size of the Cherubim guarding the Garden, and if they were wielding a flaming sword, the sword must have been rather large. The reasoning goes like this:

The length of a sword will depend on the type of sword and the size of the person who wields it. According to [this site](#), the length of a Longsword and the length of a Single-Handed sword will be quite different:

“Longsword: For a longsword, which is typically a two-handed sword, a common rule of thumb is that the sword should be roughly the same length as the person wielding it. This means that when holding the sword upright with the tip resting on the ground, the pommel (handle) should be near the person's shoulder level.”

“Single-Handed Sword: For a single-handed sword, such as a one-handed arming sword or a cut-and-thrust sword, the length can be somewhat shorter compared to the person's height. It is often recommended that the sword's length should be approximately two-thirds the length of the person's forearm, from the elbow to the tip of the middle finger.”

If, as I suspect the case to be, the Cherubin at the garden held a Longsword that was a flaming sword, it would be nearly the shoulder height of the Cherubim, which may have been, say 12 feet if the dimensions described in the Temple are accurate to the kind of angel.

On the other hand, if the Cherubim held a single-handed flaming sword, it may have “only” been about 3 feet long. I tend to believe the sword would have been a Longsword though, which would make it a very large sword by any measure.

As a side note, it would have been quite the sight in the Temple at Jerusalem to see the fully spread wings of two Cherubim, side to side, which covered the entire width of the interior of the Temple – 35 feet wide wingtip to wingtip, and being 15 feet tall it surely would have been a magnificent thing ... and possibly a little scary to see.

The sword has an important place in history because it was a close-in combat weapon, regardless of whether it was used for offensive or defensive purposes. It served as an extension to the arm, it had to be sharp for the purpose of penetrating the flesh of the enemy, as well as strong enough to not break through its regular use. Battles could be won or lost based on the quality of the sword, but it was equally important for the one wielding the sword to be skilled enough to use it properly, and one had to be strong enough to use it. If any of these factors were lacking, the battle – the fight – could be lost.

The sword became a representation of something more spiritual as well. Many times the scriptures describe the sword of justice in reference to how it is able to divide truth from error much as a sword can divide flesh from flesh.

Alma 14:99 Behold, we went forth, even in wrath, with mighty threatenings to destroy his church. Oh, then, why did he not consign us to an awful destruction; yea, why did he not let **the sword of his justice** fall upon us and doom us to eternal despair?

Alma 25:6 Behold, I would tell you something concerning the justice of God and **the sword of his almighty wrath**, which doth hang over you, except ye repent and withdraw your armies into your own lands, or the lands of your possessions, which is the land of Nephi; yea, I would tell you these things, if ye were capable of hearkening unto them;

Alma 27:48 Behold, it is time; yea, the time is now at hand, that except ye do bestir yourselves in the defense of your country and your little ones, **the sword of justice doth hang over you; yea, and it shall fall upon you and visit you even to your utter destruction.**

Helaman 5:6 And he said unto them, Behold, I, Samuel, a Lamanite, do speak the words of the Lord which he doth put into my heart; and behold, he hath put it into my heart to say unto this people that **the sword of justice hangeth over this people; and four hundred years passeth not away save the sword of justice falleth upon this people;**

3 Nephi 9:56 And it shall come to pass, **saith the Father, that the sword of my justice shall hang over them at that day; and except they repent, it shall fall upon them,** saith the Father, yea, even upon all the nations of the Gentiles.

3 Nephi 13:57 And when ye shall see these sayings coming forth among you, then ye need not any longer spurn at the doings of the Lord, **for the sword of his justice is in his right hand;** and behold, at that day if ye shall spurn at his doings, he will cause that it shall soon overtake you.

Ether 3:97 Yea, even **the sword of the justice of the eternal God shall fall upon you,** to your overthrow and destruction, if ye shall suffer these things to be.

In each of these the sword does not necessarily refer to a literal sword, but to the swift and unstoppable force God will exert to divide the righteous from the wicked.

The Word of God is represented by a sword as well:

Hebrews 4:12 For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and **sharper than any two-edged sword**, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

We see in this passage the two most important traits of a sword: its sharpness and its toughness, or as this describes, its power. This brings to mind the idea that it is so sharp

that it can even separate the soul from the spirit. Or in other words, there is nothing sharper than the Word of God.

As if to take this comparison to the fullest extreme, we find the following in John's writing:

Revelation 1:16 And he had in his right hand seven stars; **and out of his mouth went a sharp two-edged sword**; and his countenance was as the sun shining in his strength.

Revelation 2:16 Repent, or else I will come unto thee quickly and **will fight against them with the sword of my mouth**.

This was not even a new idea in this last book, as the idea was introduced in the Old Testament some 800 years earlier -

Isaiah 49:2 And **he hath made my mouth like a sharp sword**; in the shadow of his hand hath he hid me and made me a polished shaft; in his quiver hath he hid me,

Paul included this in his epistle to the Ephesians when describing the armor of God -

Ephesians 6

10 Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might.

11 Put on the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

12 For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.

13 Wherefore, **take unto you the whole armor of God**, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and, having done all, to stand.

14 Stand, therefore, **having your loins girt about with truth** and having on **the breastplate of righteousness**,

15 **And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace**--

16 Above all, taking **the shield of faith**, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.

17 And take **the helmet of salvation** and **the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God**,

18 Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints,

It should be superfluous at this point to make distinction between defensive and offensive armor, as these are all part of the battle we face. Shields can be used to deflect, but they can also be used to attack, and the shoes on your feet can be used to stand firm or to advance. Regardless of their particular use, they are all part of the same armor in the spiritual battles that we face, without any part of which we may be vulnerable to attack or be unable to advance.

When Paul identifies the “sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God,” he gives a spiritual insight that is similar in context to the parables that Jesus spoke. We have examples given in which the voice of Jesus did what swords do – piercing people to the heart:

Helaman 2:94 And it came to pass **when they heard this voice** and beheld that it was not a voice of thunder, neither was it a voice of a great tumultuous noise--but behold, it was a still voice of perfect mildness, as if it had been a whisper; and **it did pierce even to the very soul.**

3 Nephi 5:5 And it was not a harsh voice, neither was it a loud voice; nevertheless, and **notwithstanding it being a small voice, it did pierce them that did hear to the center,** insomuch that there was no part of their frame that it did not cause to quake; yea, **it did pierce them to the very soul** and did cause their hearts to burn.

These two events were separated by the time between the crucifixion and Jesus’ appearance to the Nephites later that same year, but the effect was the same: it caused their hearts to be pierced in such a way that it was unmistakable.

There is something to be said about the Word of God and its correct use because just as any sword can fight an enemy it can also cause “collateral damage” if used incorrectly or for the wrong purposes. There are some preachers who might wield the Word of God like a sword in a wanton fashion, causing injury where none was due, or causing damage where it does more harm than good. This is why the entire armor of God is necessary – it keeps all the pieces of the armor in check so that they work properly together and for the right cause.

Along this vein, we can see that Nephi, when he had obtained the sword of Laban, took it with him and later used it to make more swords like it. It had a blade of fine steel and a hilt of pure gold, though I suspect the replicas Nephi made didn’t have a hilt of gold. They were made in the same pattern though. His purpose in doing so was to defend his people against his brothers when they would come to attack.

But there is a type here that needs to be considered. In the same trip to Jerusalem when Nephi and Zoram obtained the Brass Plates, Nephi also obtained the sword of Laban. Laban was the keeper of the Brass Plates, which had the words of God up to that time. On that trip to Jerusalem they both obtained the Word of God and the sword of one who was the keeper of that word. It is after this that Nephi received his calling as a prophet as shown in 1 Nephi 3, which calling came after he had obeyed the Word of the Lord by faith.

After their arrival upon the land of promise, and after being separated from his brothers Laman and Lemuel, Nephi used the sword of Laban as a template for making other swords. To me it seems appropriate that this should be the case as the Brass Plates would serve the spiritual purpose while the swords would serve the physical purpose, yet they also served the same purpose one to the other – to protect the people of God. Many times we find that the battles between the Nephites and Lamanites were won by the Nephites, not

because they were necessarily larger than the Lamanites, but because their faith in the Word of God gave them strength that the Lamanites did not have.

Moreover, we see in the days of chief captain Moroni that the Lamanites did not cloth themselves with anything defensive, depending solely on their skills with offensive weapons. The Lamanites could not withstand the blows of the Nephites as well as the Nephites could withstand the blows of the Lamanites. The Lamanites didn't wear armor.

Alma 20

39 And it came to pass that the Lamanites, when they saw the Nephites coming upon them in their rear, turned them about and began to contend with the army of Lehi; and the work of death commenced on both sides;

40 But it was more dreadful on the part of the **Lamanites; for their nakedness was exposed to the heavy blows of the Nephites**, with their swords and their cimeters, which brought death almost at every stroke; while on the other hand, there was **now and then a man fell among the Nephites by their swords and the loss of blood--**

41 They being shielded from the more vital parts of the body, **or the more vital parts of the body being shielded from the strokes of the Lamanites by their breastplates, and their armshields, and their headplates; and thus the Nephites did carry on the work of death among the Lamanites.**

42 And it came to pass that the Lamanites became frightened because of the great destruction among them, even until they began to flee towards the river Sidon.

The comparison is almost too easy to make, and yet we learn a real-life value from these passages. We know from another of Paul's writings how we receive faith:

Romans 10

14 How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?

15 And how shall they preach, except they be sent? As it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace and bring glad tidings of good things!

16 So then, **faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.**

17 But I say, Have they not heard? Yes, verily; their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world.

There are some who try to use the armor of God incorrectly, but in doing so they are not able to use it successfully for the intent it was given. The sword is ***only one part*** of the whole armor of God, but knowing the word of God and using it correctly are not the same thing either. The rulers of the Jews could recite the word of God from the first of Genesis up to the present time, but it did not take root in them – it became just another tool they could use to further their own purposes.

As the saying goes, to someone that has a hammer, the world is filled with nails. To someone having the Word of God, they may see a world full of enemies to destroy by

dividing them asunder using the only tool they understand. That is not the purpose for the Word of God.

Matthew 5:19 (KJV verse 17) Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets; I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill.

Paul admonished Timothy about this same problem – the one involving use of the Word of God for the wrong purpose –

2 Timothy 2

15 Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, **rightly dividing the word of truth.**

16 But shun profane and vain babblings; for they will increase unto more ungodliness.

The lessons we can learn from the scriptures are as endless as the Word of God, but it behooves us to learn the right lessons and draw the right conclusions, otherwise we become as “vain babblers” like those Paul cautioned against.

The scriptures do indeed have examples of many battles, many wars, and many fights, but to dwell upon these as just military disputes would be to miss the important Spiritual lessons that the Lord has for us.

Remember to wield that sword using the hilt, and not the blade, or you'll get cut. And don't forget the rest of your armor.